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Communication Practices in a Japanese Subsidiary in the US: Globalization in Process

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Communication Practices in a Japanese Subsidiary in the US: Globalization in Process

by

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Dedication

To My Parents

Communication Practices in a Japanese Subsidiary in the US: Globalization in Process

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This dissertation explores various communication activities in a multinational workplace where employees from different cultures engage in and attempt to make sense of their reality, their experiences, and other cultures. Using an interpretive approach, I analyzed communicative practices based on three different levels—macro, local, and micro—in a Japanese multinational company based in the United States. The triangulation of methods, including participant observation, interviews, analysis of documents, and discourse analysis is used to understand the complex phenomena of intercultural communication at work on a global, local, and individual scale. At the macro level of analysis, I present the global ideology that a parent company tries to exert in order to shape organizational actors' sense-making, and influence their work attitude and

motivation. Their relationality with the external world and the power relationship between the parent company and its subsidiary are highlighted. At the local level of analysis, I demonstrate a bicultural workplace and its constituent members' learning and active negotiation by identifying mono-cultural, bicultural, negotiated, and shared cultural practices, which are likely to exist when two distinct national cultures come together in one organization. A macro level of analysis explores organizational members' face-to-face communication, including terms of address, language issues, stereotypical images toward one's own and other nationals, humor, and videoconferences. By looking at intercultural communication from the above three levels of analysis, this study shows that cultural factors, such as a shared ideology, goal, history, membership, or expectation, and habitualized practices influence successful interactions at work, regardless of members' different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In contrast, members from different cultures still retain mental cultural images or possibly conflicting perceptions and must constantly negotiate which is right, which is better, and which is the American or the Japanese way. Intercultural communication in the workplace is not a one time interaction, but an on-going activity involving habitualization, relationaility, and contextuality. This dissertation suggests both what should be emphasized in a practical sense when working with intercultural members of a working environment and attempting to find a middle ground, and what should be considered academically when studying intercultural communication in a multinational workplace in the future.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1: Introduction

I have been interested in studying intercultural communication for more than ten years. When I first encountered the field of intercultural communication, I was a senior at college in Japan. I was fascinated to find out ways Japanese tend to behave and communicate that were very different from Westerners'. I read many books and articles that explained cultural values and beliefs that were deeply embedded in people's communication styles. For me it all made sense because we were living in different cultures that had different rituals, customs, languages, and experiences, which had all evolved through a long history by our ancestors. With the hope that I wanted to continue studying intercultural communication, I came to the US, though without really knowing a real meaning of intercultural communication, except for identifying differences among nationalities. During my master's degree, I persistently tried to find out differences of behaviors or perceptions and validate the findings of past studies that nominally identified communicative differences between Japanese and Americans. Toward the end of my degree, my interest moved to different conflict management styles used by Japanese and American leaders. Again, I tried to verify how the leaders of the two nations tended to engage in managing conflict and chose this as my thesis project. This time, however, I added an exploratory questionnaire into the well-established forced-choice questionnaire of conflict mode (see for details Tsutsui, 1996). In the exploratory questionnaire, I provided specific but imaginative conflict situations (contexts) and asked respondents to

write down freely the actions they would take. The results from the forced-choice and exploratory questionnaires contradicted each other.[1] While the first force-choice questionnaire generated the results that supported the past studies' findings which were easily understood based on the cultural perspectives, the other questionnaire with a specific situation rejected this generally known or culturally comprehended notion. *Context* tried to speak to me, yet I was not sure what it was at that time.

During my work toward the doctoral degree, I have suffered from academic confusion. Although I was still interested in intercultural communication, I could not even decipher what intercultural communication really was and how I could make sense of this field. With this confusion, I began fieldwork at a multinational company where I had dreamed of studying because that was where people from different cultures would communicate with each other under a specific context - a workplace. The only thing I knew was that I was not going to *measure* people's behaviors or communication styles in order to identify differences because I believed that once they were assessed, the context would be lost. By observing meetings, exchanging informal conversations, interviewing employees, eating the food employees eat at their cafeteria, experiencing the atmosphere the company emanates, or just situating myself in

[1] The conflict-style assessment questionnaire showed Japanese leaders to be more accommodating than American leaders while American leaders tended to be more competing, collaborating, and compromising than the Japanese leaders. Although this result did not confirm that Japanese tend to avoid conflict, it was pertinent to earlier findings that Japanese are likely to use accommodating styles whereas Americans are likely to use competing, collaborating, and compromising styles. On the other hand, the open-ended questionnaire indicated that Japanese tend to use more their authority, force, or power to resolve conflict (completing styles) when their subordinates, but not they, are involved in the conflict and time is limited (Tsutsui, 1996).

this multinational workplace, I tried to make sense of this complex phenomena of which intercultural communication was realized. Although it was quite an endeavor for me to reach my understanding of intercultural communication at work, I feel confident to discuss and present my study here as my final project.

1.1. THEORETICAL APPROACH

This study takes an ambitious approach to the study of intercultural communication occurred in Japan Semicon US Corporation (Semicon US), a Japanese subsidiary in the United States.[2] Taking advantage of the interdisciplinary fields including organizational communication, intercultural communication, and language studies, I analyze this multinational organization from structural to cultural, communicative, and linguistic perspectives. Although such vigorous attempts might provoke controversy, I believe that not only will this study provide a thorough analysis of practice, discourse, and communication in the organization, but also it will generate a sense of the dynamic of human intercultural experience in the complex world. To analyze the communication in the multinational company, I borrow the idea of Hanks's *communicative practices* (1996). Although Hanks focuses on the study of language through communicative practices, I transfer his idea into the interpretive level of analysis and explore interlocutors' experiences and sense making in/of intercultural communication by examining texts, interviews, narratives, discourse, and interactions.

The study of communicative practices involves elements of relationality, formalism of language, and ideology. Relationality examines "the cross-linkages

[2] The names of the company as well as individuals I talk about in this study are all pseudonym.

between language and context and a commitment to encompass language within them" (p. 7). In contrast, formalism focuses on understanding "general laws of language and models of the combinatory potential of linguistic systems" by drawing a line between knowledge of language and knowledge of the world (p. 7). On one hand, Hanks believes that linguistic systems are irreducible, meaning that they have their own properties that cannot be explained through non-linguistic phenomena, such as non-verbal behaviors, emotions, rationality, or social structure, and that they are systematic, regular, repeatable, and universal across time and space such that people can identify certain traits and features from other systems. On the other hand, he argues that sharing the same language or grammar is not either sufficient or necessary for people to communicate. Rather, they must share "the ability to orient themselves verbally, perceptually, and physically to each other and to their social world" (p. 229). Hanks maintains:

> People who share categories, even to a high degree, can utterly misunderstand one another if they have different views about what is going on at the moment of their interaction. Comparable views of the present can enable engagement despite language differences. In order to communicate, people must coparticipate in an interpretive community with commensurate values regarding what counts as expression and how to view it. This kind of sharing – partial, orientational, and socially distributed – may be based on common schemes of perception that go far beyond the language. (p. 229).

This notion of understanding communication is critical in my study because people (need to or are forced to) situate themselves in a specific activity of the organization that has its own history, values, purposes, and goals and often communicate with others who do not share the same language. Hanks also claims that language has three-way divisions as a semiformal system, semistructured

processes in communicative activities, and actor's ideology (p. 230). Based on this perspective, I will examine terms of address and terminologies (semiformal system), meetings and videoconferences (activities), and organizational members' image of Japanese and Americans (ideology).

Another challenge for me to approach communication in the multinational company is my original interest in *intercultural communication*. Where does culture play in the organization or workplace communication? After more than two years long ethnographic study, I finally started making sense of the complexity that underlies the practices of intercultural communication. It cannot be explained by categorizing communication styles based on nationalities because in a place like a multinational or multicultural workplace, people enculturate or acculturate themselves and change their behaviors or ways of communicating in ways that are not typical or representative of any other cultural groups. I am not even sure how much they have changed (if at all) or I cannot tell whether their original behaviors (used to) belong to their national cultures. Nor can solo examination of actual interaction or dialogue demonstrate the scope of intercultural communication, although it will provide rich information on how native and non-native speakers reach a satisfactory level of understanding using physical objects, gestures, drawing, or simple wordings in a specific context.

I came to realize that I could not talk about intercultural communication of Semicon US without discussing external effects from the process of globalization because the notion of globalization prevails within the company and in the employees' consciousness. Papasterigiadis (2000) also feels the same way, that

many issues cannot be discussed merely at a local level because many factors[3] of globalization influence people in a more open and interconnected manner (p. 76). Semicon US, a local workplace, was created in the midst of a globalization process, with strong influences from its parent company, Japan Semicon Corporation (Japan Semicon). Behind Japan Semicon, there is a history of pioneering Japanese major companies that had established their subsidiaries in the US and created a particular image about what it was like working for a Japanese company in general. The image was communicated through movies, such as "Gung Ho," or business magazines that reinforced differences between Japanese and American practices. I am not saying the image was incorrect. I do believe the individual experiences, anecdotes, difficulties, or frustrations were presented truthfully. What becomes more important is how people *habitualize* their communication practices. People bring their real experiences into sense making of the world that is relevant to the widespread knowledge about what is to be like Japanese or Americans or working for a Japanese or American company and habitualize their experience, sense making, narratives, practices, difficulties, images, differences, and similarities based on what they saw, heard, and felt. Case in point, whenever I was asked by Semicon US employees about my research, I gave a general topic, "I want to see how Japanese and Americans communicate with each other." The responses I obtained, no matter how short a time the person had been employed, were always like "Oh yeah, we have a problem" or "It's very

[3] For example, flexible and spatially extended forms of production, the rapid mobility of capital, information and goods, the denationalizing of capital, the deterritorialization of culture, the interpenetration of local communities by global media networks, and the dispersal of socio-economic power beyond the Euro-American axis (Papasterigiadis, 2000, p.76).

difficult." I am sure that they have experienced difficulties to some extent, yet at the same time they also habitualized giving this response to with the phrase *communication with Japanese/Americans*. Miscommunication, confusion, misunderstanding, differences, and difficulties seem be emphasized especially when people are communicating with others of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, the habitual ways of speaking about communication, culture, and a Japanese company are created, sustained, and terminated depending on how interlocutors situate themselves, learn, perform, obey or disobey rules, play their role, or accomplish their work within a globalized, idealized, sophisticated, intellectual, or imagined world. Thus, the ideology of intercultural communication affects how people think and talk about their communication.

To realize the study of intercultural communication in the Japanese multinational company under this scope, I employ three levels of analysis. Although a concept of rules may not play a significant role in the practice approach, it needs to be understood because it describes individual speakers' playing field (Hanks, 1996). This takes account of the concept from relationality - that a relation or engagement in action exists between persons and the field that generates speech production or intercultural talk. Therefore, dynamics of the fields in which agents play and schematic understanding of individuals need to be derived. Even though I consider globalization as an important factor, a thorough examination of its process, effects, or forms is not my focus. Rather, I describe two interconnected organizations, Japan Semicon and Semicon US, regarding them as important fields for the employees to accomplish their tasks, because

Semicon US is not disconnectable in nature from Japan Semicon. Going back to Papasterigiadis's confession, a local community, here Semicon US, cannot be discussed without the force of globalization, which its parent company, Japan Semicon, has a lot to do with. I investigate Japan Semicon, which has gone global, and Semicon US, which is a part of that expanded structure. Then, I bring the analysis into individual and interactional levels. Intercultural communication in a multinational company is not a one-event moment. In other words, individuals and their interactions cannot be understood within one frame. People are free but habitualized beings. At work, especially, employees work together in a shared environment, construct their identity through relationships with others, and negotiate what to do it and how to do by habitualizing their practices and perspectives through everyday interactions. Using an interpretive approach, I will present how employees in Semicon US engage in, maintain, construct, and deconstruct communicative activities and make sense of the intercultural world where they work and habitualize their practices.

1.2. ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

It was a challenging task for me to decide how to organize this in-depth ethnographic study, what to include, and what to leave out. As I began to make sense of the complexity of intercultural communication at a workplace toward the end of my fieldwork, I decided to organize the dissertation in the following manner.

In this opening chapter I provide a brief introduction and personal narrative to orient the reader to understanding how and why my interest and

academic struggle finally brought the realization of this study. Chapter 2 offers main concerns to be kept in mind in the study of intercultural communication at a Japanese subsidiary in the US. More specifically, I first reviewed how the field of intercultural communication began and how the concepts of intercultural communication were constructed. After examining several approaches to the study of intercultural communication, I introduced how I want to advance my study of a Japanese multinational company based on different perspectives. I also present effects of the globalization process on international corporations, a history of Japanese companies in the US, and relevant studies of multinational companies because this is background knowledge of the companies. In the end of the chapter, several research questions are proposed and the significance of the study is identified. Chapter 3 discusses methods used for the research and delineates the process of gaining acceptance as a researcher in Semicon US. In Chapter 4, I described the global ideology of Japan Semicon, the parent company of Semicon US. This chapter specifically focuses on relationality and power - how Japan Semicon exercised power to bring a notion of globalization to value making among the Semicon Group. Chapter 5 provides bicultural aspects of Semicon US as a local field in which employees play. I illustrate how both Japanese and American employees attempt to make sense of different cultural practices and negotiated differences. In Chapter 6, I focus on face-to-face communication practices in Semicon US. I selected for analysis the terms of address, the stereotypic images toward both Japanese and Americans, humor used between American and Japanese employees, and routine videoconferences. In the

concluding chapter, I discuss what I learned about intercultural communication at a multinational workplace based on the longitudinal study, how my different identities influenced this research, and how this study can impact the study of intercultural communication.

Chapter 2: Intercultural Communication & Japanese Multinational Organizations

2.1. STUDIES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

2.1.1. The Beginning of the Study of Intercultural Communication: Assumptions

The study of intercultural communication started at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the U.S. Department of State between 1946 and 1956 to solve inefficiencies and failures that American diplomats had been experiencing abroad due to their inability to speak a foreign language and to their lack of understanding of the host culture (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Hall, 1956). Edward Hall[4] and his colleagues, who were anthropologists, joined FSI in 1951 to improve the training program. Initially, Hall attempted to fashion the training after university anthropology curricula.[5] FSI students, however, preferred training that would bring immediate results to learning theories or abstract concepts of culture. In other words, they asked for clearer interactional guidelines that included specific practices and behaviors in the country where they were assigned. Hall changed his curriculum according to this request, instructing students in behaviors that would likely be practiced in their assigned foreign countries and in how to interact with foreign nationals. Learning different

[4] Edward Hall is now identified as the founder of intercultural communication in the United States (Rogers, 1999). His book *The Silent Language*, published in 1959, is also recognized as the first work in the field of intercultural communication.

[5] Hall's curriculum focused on ideas of culture, traditional objects or belief systems, and how to observe people before making conclusions about their interactions.

practices and beliefs is important in order to avoid offending people in foreign countries as well as to develop *sensitivity* to their cultures, needs, and feelings.

The focus on cultural practices, rituals, customs, values, and beliefs in the FSI training, however, emphasized more differences than similarities and engendered a notion of negative consequences from communicating with culturally different people. The definition of intercultural communication involved negative terms, and cultural difference were treated as a leading factor in misunderstandings and conflicts. For instance, Bennett, a well-known intercultural communication theorist as well as a trainer, illustrates that "cross-cultural contact usually has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide. The continuation of this pattern in today's world of unimagined interdependence is not just immoral or unprofitable – it is self-destructive" (1993, p. 105). Furthermore, Samovar and Porter (1994) in a popular intercultural communication textbook explain intercultural communication as problematic and a cause of misunderstanding: "intercultural communication occurs whenever a message that must be understood is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture. This circumstance can be problematic because … culture forges and shapes the individual communicator" (p. 19). Barna, moreover, asks "why is it that contact with persons from other cultures is so often frustrating and fraught with misunderstanding?" (1998, p. 173). To bridge this gap among different cultures, academic scholars use different approaches and attempt to find solutions and to minimize misunderstanding or conflict.

2.1.2. Approaches to the Study of Intercultural Communication

Approaches to the study of intercultural communication vary with regard to goals, methodologies, assumptions of human behaviors, and relationship of culture to communication. Martin and Nakayama (1997, 1999) identify social science (functionalist) and interpretive approaches which focus on face-to-face communication. Similarly, Kim (1988) categorizes positivist and humanist approaches.

Social Science (Functionalist or Positivist) Approach. The social science approach was the mainstream of intercultural communication studies in the 1980s. It was developed based on the premises of psychology and sociology which hypothesized that human behavior tends to be controlled by an external reality; therefore, it is predictable. In this approach, culture is viewed as a definite and almost absolute variable that influences human interaction. Young (1996) identifies this approach as the quest for dichotomy and absolutism as culturally influenced individuals. The method of study is mainly quantitative.

In this approach, more generalized, simplified, and stereotypical behaviors are sought. Researchers use cultural variables to examine how people behave differently (see Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Gudykunst, 1998; Hall & Hall, 1990; Harris & Moran, 1991). The most important cultural traits applied by various disciplines in examining cross-cultural issues are individualism and collectivism (e.g., Triandis, 1994; Gire & Carment, 1993; Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trusbisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishida, 1991). Collectivistic cultures are characterized by subordination of individual goals to the goals of a collective, the

creation of a sense of harmony, interdependence, and concern for others; individualistic cultures are characterized by subordination of the goals of the collective to individual goals, the creation of a sense of independence, and a lack of concern for others (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1995). Hofstede's study (1980), which is probably the best-known cross-cultural study across disciplines, specifically identifies which countries show more individualistic characteristics and which countries are more collectivistic. Individualistic cultures are found mainly in Western countries, while collectivistic cultures are found predominantly in Asian countries. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to note that this does not mean that people in individualistic countries are all individualistic nor that people in collectivistic countries are all collectivists. Individual differences certainly exist; however, more individualistic than collectivistic people are found in individualistic countries and more collectivistic than individualistic people are found in collectivistic countries (Yamaguchi, Kuhlman & Sugimori, 1995; Chen, Xiao-Ping, & James, 1998; Triandis, 1995).

The other major cultural variables are "high-context" and "low-context," as identified by Hall (1977). Although "high- and low-context culture" is often used interchangeably with "collectivism" and "individualism" respectively, these concepts focus on more communicative activities such as speech rather than values and norms. In high-context cultures, people communicate with each other through fairly simple messages because the information is embedded in the situation or in nonverbal cues (Samovar & Porter, 1994). People are usually familiar with situations in which little heterogeneity exists. Therefore, not only

can people limit verbalizing everything to communicate what they mean, but they also expect others to 'read their minds' or recognize implicit meanings through their common values, beliefs, norms, and nonverbal behaviors. High-context messages are often seen in Asian countries such as Japan or Korea, Mediterranean countries such as Greece, and among people who have long-term relationships, such as old couples or lifelong friends. On the other hand, in low-context cultures, such as Germany, the US, or Canada, where homogeneity is rarely found, people have to explicitly elaborate what they mean through verbal messages. Since information cannot be understood internally, people must use specific and clear messages to understand each other (Samovar & Porter, 1994).

Based on the above cultural dimensions, researchers attempt to predict people's behaviors or communication patterns and styles based on their nationalities. Many cross-cultural studies treating a variety of topics have been conducted in the past, including cross-cultural face negotiation styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Cocroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Sueda & Wiseman, 1992), conflict management styles (Ting-Toomey, et al., 1991; Tinsley, 1998; Westwood, Tang, & Kirkbride, 1992), uncertainty avoidance styles (Gudykunst, 1988; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984), and leadership styles (Smith, et al., 1989, 1992, 1994). The purpose of these studies is to compare behaviors among different nationalities and explain how people from different cultures are likely to misunderstand each other due to their culturally bounded behaviors. Participants' behaviors or communication styles are measured quantitatively using survey or closed-ended questionnaires.

The social science approach has advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that it identifies communication variations in different groups or nationalities and their psychological and sociological influences in the communication process. Another advantage is that people can be careful not to offend or misjudge others based on their own ethnocentric cultural values and beliefs. Predicted behaviors might help reduce anxiety when people have no clue how to cope with strangers from different cultures. The downside, however, is a lack of specific situational contexts in which interactants are involved. More specifically, generalized behaviors, which are governed by national cultures, were discussed as if they were seen in almost any context. For example, some studies demonstrate that when people manage conflict, Americans tend to be aggressive and Japanese tend to be accommodating. Not only does this finding exclude factors such as individual status, experience, or age, but it also ignores levels of conflict ranging from intrapersonal to interpersonal, organizational, and international. The simplification of complicated human behaviors and attributions might limit the applicability and effectiveness of actual communicative activities. Furthermore, many researchers began discovering limitations in the use of Western-style questionnaires or measurements in other countries, realizing that individual behaviors are often more creative than predictable (Martin & Nakayama, 1997). Finally, data from quantitative research methods using questionnaires and surveys were based on participants' imagination and not on actually conducted behaviors or interactions. Thus, a lack of realism is a final disadvantage worth mentioning.

Interpretive (Humanist) Approach. The second approach to the study of intercultural communication is the interpretive or humanist approach. This approach was founded by ethnographers of communication and sociolinguists. The interpretive approach gained the attention of communication scholars in the late 1980s (Martin & Nakayama, 1997). Ethnographers of communication analyze speech within situational contexts that reflect cultural norms in talk and acts. This perspective investigates social and cultural meanings conveyed by words, messages, and interactions (Saville-Troike, 1998; Keating, 2001). In contrast, sociolinguists seek to identify linguistic patterns and the impact of cultural values on discourse within a community. They consider gender, age, class, region, race, or ethnicity as significant factors that affect communicative performance, and they value context as the core of social interaction and investigation of language (Bonvillain, 1993; Clyne, 1994; Yamada, 1992). The goal of the interpretive approach is not to predict behaviors but to describe communication patterns in specific cultural groups. Methods of study in this approach include field studies, observations, and participant observations that were adopted from anthropology and linguistics.

Scollon and Scollon (1995) have established a theoretical framework for the study of intercultural communication using a discourse approach. They make a clear distinction between cross-cultural communication and intercultural communication. Cross-cultural communication studies compare communication systems of different cultural groups “abstractly . . . or independently from any form of social interaction” (p. 13), whereas intercultural communication studies

observe communication in which people of different groups are directly involved. According to Scollon and Scollon, a social science approach falls into the cross-cultural communication category due to its focus on finding out differences, which are independent from any social interactions, among different cultural groups. In contrast, a discourse approach falls into the intercultural communication category, or, in their term, interdiscourse communication. Scollon and Scollon believe that misunderstanding in intercultural communication can be considerable but that cultural differences are not the only cause of problems in interactions. They assert factors of culture, such as ideology, socialization, forms of discourse, and face systems, which are essential to understanding intercultural discourse. Since these factors influence interactants who engage in multiple discourse systems in the same culture, they tend to create conflict with those people as well. To name a few, some other significant factors to be considered in intercultural communication are specific contexts in which people are involved at that moment, gender, time spent together, the degree of knowing others, status, hierarchy, and internal sub-groupings. According to Scollon and Scollon's point of view, no one possesses completely different kinds of cultural factors from others of different cultural groups. In other words, even if people do not come from the same cultural background, they are likely to share some of the cultural factors named above.

To review some of the studies of intercultural communication using the interpretive or discourse approach, I will start with Gumperz's analysis. Gumperz's work (1982, 1992) can be identified as the initial study relating to

cross-cultural talk. He focuses on interethnic interactions of English-speaking groups, such as Indians, British, and Americans. He claims that even though people share the same native language (English), they are likely to misunderstand each other due to differences such as intonation or the way they say things. Namely, communication problems occur in the area of social interpretation and expectation. This phenomenon transpires in every communication message in which individuals exercise their social values, relational definitions, emotions, and expectations of behavior based on mutually anticipated socio-cultural background, knowledge, and experiences. Gumperz argues that people habitually use "contextualization cues" and interpret the meaning of messages. A contextualization cue refers to "any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 131). Contextualization cues help listeners understand and interpret what is meant by speakers and determine how to proceed with the conversation accordingly. Since contextualization cues are actualized through a "historically given linguistic repertoire of the participants," misunderstanding or miscommunication among English speakers from different countries tends to occur not through mere linguistic or grammatical error but through socio-cultural misunderstanding (1982, p. 132).

Nonverbal signs are also a part of contextualization cues which, like language, are "learned through interaction, culturally specific and analyzable in terms of underlying processes" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 141). Therefore, conversational synchrony is realized when a speaker's moves and a listener's

responses follow regular rhythmic intervals. This is often related to the similarity among participants' backgrounds as well as to their ability to find common grounds of experience which help them build interaction.

Similar to Gumperz's contention, Maynard (1989, 1997) maintains the importance of interactants' sensitivity to self-contextualization (empathizing by paying attention to the context, particularly the way one's partner responds) in Japanese social interactions. Using microanalysis of discourse, Maynard demonstrates how Japanese and Americans send backchannels in their conversations. Her comparison of empirical research showed regularity between them. More specifically, head movement by both Japanese and Americans signals the listener's response; however, Japanese speakers use head movement more than Americans do. Further, Japanese speakers tend to nod while they speak, punctuating the flow of discourse more frequently than do Americans. In contrast, Americans use vertical head movements with phonological prominence with emphatic function and headshake more often than Japanese do (Maynard, 1997). Maynard empirically proved that the Japanese language, frequently marked by final particles, provides opportunities for back channels and creates recipient-sensitive verbal exchange. Consequently, head movement among Japanese and American interactants indicates different roles of conversation management. Although similarities between Japanese and Americans are found in the use of head movement, such as showing agreement or notifying listeners of turn transition, turn claim, or the end of the clause, more frequent head movement by Japanese confirms their constant empathy and sensitivity to building rapport on

the part of both participants (Maynard, 1989). This difference explains a frequent remark that I heard in Semicon US which stressed that many American employees needed to keep in mind that a constant "yes" from a Japanese employee, when they repeatedly nod their head, does not mean that they agree with the American, but means, "I'm listening. Go ahead." From the Japanese perspective, a lack of head movement might be taken as a sign of disinterest on the listener's part.

Paulk (1997) adopts a model of the ethnography of communication to demonstrate how language problems between Japanese and American talks in a Japanese subsidiary in the US are the main source of conflict in building relationships. She examines communication breakdowns or mishaps that are often caused by the Japanese non-native speech. English, as a second language spoken by the Japanese, sounds "too direct, inappropriate, disrespectful and often rude" to some Americans (p. 250). Even a very tolerant American subordinate finds it irritating if his Japanese manager asks him something repeatedly using the same phrase, "Please do." The reliance on a well-rehearsed and learned repertoire for non-native speakers to use with their instructions and directions becomes problematic, for it lacks the variety of expression that "soften[s] the blow and grease[s] the way for cooperation and compliance" (p. 250). Such simple and repeated expressions also negatively affect the perception of the warmth, depth, and personality of the non-native speakers. Although non-native linguistic difficulties, such as errors and dysfluencies, can be considered problems but not miscommunication (Banks, Gao, & Bakers, 1991), Paulk maintains:

> linguistic dysfluencies, and all of the errors, mishaps and difficulties the employees experience with Japlish, foreigner talk and intercultural

> discourse, are very much a part of the "miscommunicative menace." I say this for one reason alone, and that is because, on a day by day basis, all of these little difficulties have the ability to accumulate and build up between people with what seems almost exponential growth. In other words, little mishaps can grow and fester until they become one giant mass of miscommunication, and until it, in turn, becomes the general state of affairs. (p. 252).

In other words, small linguistic errors and dysfluencies resulting from Japanese-English might not cause misunderstanding or have significant impact on difficulties in particular interactions; however, they can collectively lead to serious miscommunication over time.

Paulk's findings differ from Kleinberg's (1994), another examination of a Japanese subsidiary in the US, in this case a year-long ethnographic study. Kleingerg investigated one particular group and found out that one Japanese manager, whose speaking behavior is rather fast and monotonous and involves a number of incomplete sentences, created a deep emotional bond with his group members. The American group members learned to understand in spite of his speaking style, through context, his energy, and the emotion that he expressed. They tried to bridge the language gap between him and themselves by not literally interpreting what he said. For example, if he said, "Don't be stupid," it was not to be interpreted as, "Is he calling me stupid?" but rather as "Now let's think things out beforehand" (p. 31). Paulk's and Kleinberg's studies demonstrate that American employees may react differently to non-native speakers' speech. The major difference is the context in which Japanese and Americans were involved with each other. In Paulk's study, Japanese and American employees handled day-to-day tasks which might have required only a minimum level of interaction.

Even in the relationship between manager and subordinate, they may not have had to share their opinions and beliefs or exchange intense conversation to get things done. On the other hand, the group members in Kleinberg's study likely needed to spend more time with each other to accomplish group assignments and goals. In such a circumstance, they had more opportunities to get to know each other on a personal level. Based on the two studies, I can conclude that linguistic dysfluencies can become sources of miscommunication and misunderstanding unless native speakers have the opportunity to understand non-native speakers not based on how they speak but based on who they are.

Using interaction analysis, some scholars examined videotaped actual interactions in which members of different cultural groups directly engaged and analyzed how they communicated successfully regardless of cultural and national backgrounds. For example, Streeck (1997) examined videotaped interactions in a multicultural car repair shop. He demonstrates how shared knowledge about cars and gestures enable the participants to attain mutual understanding. The videotaped episodes show that when communication through language fails, other resources can help people understand each other in such a share context. Most recently, Sunaoshi (1999) examined intercultural communication in a Japanese multinational company employing interactional analysis. She focused on more linguistic strategies of how Japanese and Americans strive to communicate with each other and illustrated how strategies of simplification and clarification and non-verbal devices, using tools and objects, specifically contributed to successful interactions.

Interpretive approaches also search for some kind of generalization in human interaction, but they consider situational contexts seriously. Except for some studies that examined how a successful interaction was realized and what kind of strategies people use to reach mutual understanding, I agree with Koole & ten Thije's contention (1994) that the majority of the studies are still preoccupied with the notion that cultural differences tend to bring misunderstanding and miscommunication.

As many intercultural communication studies indicate, the phenomena involved in the simple phrase "intercultural communication" are in fact very complicated. Blommaert and Verschueren (1991) maintain that studies of intercultural communication "should start from the amazing complexity and the dynamics of crucial notions such as 'culture,' 'nation,' 'society,' 'race,' or even 'group'" (p. 4). They challenge scholars to ask when and how pragmatic analysis reveals "culture" or "nation" in discourse. However, discourse analysis is not useful in describing a culture because the concept of culture is too broad (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). In fact, an abstract, broad notion of culture sometimes hinders other causes of international conflict, such as social conditions or politics, that might arise independently from cultural disagreement (Blommaert, 1991; Scollon and Scollon, 1995).

Having acknowledged the study of intercultural communication, I will now discuss how I approach the study of a Japanese subsidiary in the US.

2.2. FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY

I will study intercultural communication in a Japanese subsidiary in the US taking an interpretive approach. To resolve some concerns that were addressed in the past studies, I will consider the following points. First and foremost, this study is careful not to view all misunderstanding, miscommunication, and communication breakdown as products of cultural differences. As Koole and ten Thije insist, we should not "treat misunderstanding as a special case and certainly not as the intercultural moment of the communication" (1994, p. 69). While I do not ignore the existence of different cultural practices, I will not limit my views and interpretations to cultural differences in analyzing the situation.

Second, I will focus not only on actual interactions but also on macro contexts (or *field,* in Hanks's term[6]) that include historical or social context, different practices, or unique organizational (sub)cultures in which intercultural interaction takes place. As I briefly mentioned in the introduction, Hanks's communication practice theory provides a framework for integrating these different aspects of context. Hanks argues that meanings of interaction are understood not only through language and engagement of body posture, gesture, and gaze, but also through interactants' habits, strategies, acknowledgements of "what is going on," ideologies, and speech contexts. Furthermore, Scollon and

[6] In the study of language, *field* can be identified as a social space of objective relationships in which people have social identities and ongoing relations to each other and to the setting of communicative practices (Hanks, 1996). However, due to the analysis of social interaction in my study, I will also consider it as a social space in which employees are involved and interact with others according to their relationship to their organizations.

Scollon (1995) emphasize the importance of examining a corporate ideology, including history, organizational worldview, beliefs, and values, to sufficiently understand corporate discourse systems.

Finally, I will also pay attention to habitus as an important concept in a specific social context where interlocutors are involved. Habitus refers to the "routine modes of perception, action, and evaluation" (p. 238). Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1991) used the term habitus to refer to a relation between micro interaction and global understanding. Habitus in Hank's work involves more flexibility, improvisation, novelty, production, and reproduction than Bourdieu's notion of habitus, which tends to be considered difficult to change or just a mere production. More specifically, people certainly engage with others through familiarity of places, utterances, gestures, and circumstances; however, their practices are always subject to change according to their "strategy," the way of seeking a certain achievement and result (p. 12). Further, we habitualize perspectives by repeatedly describing the world – habitualization of perspective. Some of the examples are "Dinner's on the table; let's eat," "One round-trip ticket to Hyde Park, please," and "It's another gray day" (p. 237). These descriptions "habituate ways of experiencing the world of objects" (p. 237). Hanks also argues that habitus is similar to ideology because it does not mean that people speaking the same language share the same way of viewing objects or engaging in verbal practice. Habitus is highly influenced not by the language people share but by the place and positions (field) in which they situate themselves in society. Therefore, habitus is a representation of routinization or the beginning and end of regularity

that is expressed verbally and nonverbally without isolating utterances from context. I will pay attention to the notion of habitus by examining repetitive practices and accounts used by interactants.

Having framed my approach to the study of intercultural communication, I will explain the importance of studying a Japanese multinational company in this manner.

2.3. JAPANESE MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE US

2.3.1. Why study a Japanese Multinational Company in the US?

Japanese multinationals made an appearance in world marketing in the late 19th century and aggressively acquired foreign companies in the 1980s and 1990s. With the rapid growth of the Japanese economy, people in many countries experienced increased opportunities to do business or work with Japanese. The United States is not an exception. Japanese direct investments became the second largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States, following Great Britain. Japanese buyouts of MCA, Columbia Pictures, CBS Records, and the Rockefeller Center, however, created a sense of threat, inducing phrases such as "Japan-bashing" or "Japanphobia" among Americans (Wilkins, 1990). A movie "Rising Sun" in 1993 reflects this image. Along with this negative public feeling toward Japanese multinationals, Japanese companies were often depicted as strange or conservative, as if they had come from a totally different planet. American employees who worked for Japanese companies also criticized them, claiming that the companies tried to implement Japanese practices, which neither worked nor fit in the US. Further, many books and articles were published on how

to reconcile differences and manage a successful business relationship between Japanese and Americans. That time has passed. The sense of distance in the world has been numbed due to technology and cyberspace. Globalization has considerably affected the world economy. The derogatory phrases toward Japanese companies disappeared with the recovery of the American economy and the decline of the Japanese economy. In all this, Japanese managers and American employees have gained knowledge on different cultural practices, rituals, and successful ways of working with people of different cultures. This history caused certain self-consciousness in Japanese companies that may or may not be the same in multinationals rooted in other countries. With the golden age of Japanese economy and negative attitudes now things of the past, how are Japanese companies creating satisfactory workplaces in the US? How do employees engage in everyday interaction and make sense of their workplace, co-workers, and experiences?

To properly understand the big picture of the Japanese subsidiary in the US, I will delineate the effects of globalization, a history of Japanese companies in the US, and past relevant studies that examined Japanese as well as other multinationals companies.

2.3.2. Effects of Globalization on Corporations

Why do I need to discuss globalization? The process of globalization has influenced international and multinational companies, including Semicon US, as well as individual people, such that I cannot avoid addressing issues related to globalization. Although the term *globalization* is widely used and often misused

(Beck, 2000), it is generally understood as a process during which the world has been shrunk, downsized, or compressed and during which people have gained consciousness of the world (Robertson, 1992). The Oxford Dictionary of New Words further clarifies globalization as "global consciousness as receptiveness to (and understanding) of cultures other than one's own, often as part of an appreciation of world socio-economic and ecological issues" (1991, p.133). The term *globalization* was first used approximately forty years ago in relation to economy, although the idea of a global market existed long before (Cable, 1999). Despite this early debut of the term, globalization was only recognized as an important concept in academia beginning in the 1980s (Robertson, 1992). Now, an abundance of books and articles discuss its effects and relations to sociological perspectives (e.g., Robertson, 1992), anthropological issues (e.g., Hannerz, 1996; Appadurai, 1996), and, of course, business (e.g., Dunning, 1993; Dussauge & Garrette, 1999; Cerny, 1995; Pauly & Reich, 1997).

In the business world, globalization of a company means internationalization of economic and marketing activity and capital movement (Prakash & Hart, 2000; Qureshi, 1996). Because the Japan Semicon Group places a strong emphasis on becoming a *global* (not a multinational) company, I will refine how scholars differentiate multinational and global corporations. According to Marquardt's classifications (1999), multinational companies are primarily concerned with price (lower-cost) in sourcing, manufacturing, and marketing worldwide. Headquarters, which is usually run by home-country nationals, are considered less important; instead, regional or national operations have more

independence in terms of decision-making, business process, and technology. On the other hand, global companies operate without geographic boundaries, maintaining global thinking and global competency. They value diversity in their organizational culture, business process, policies, and product-related technologies, while communication technologies and training of the workforce are standardized. Global organizations emphasize both universal and local objectives and maintain an interdependent and cooperative relationship between the headquarters and subsidiaries (Marquardt, 1999). Ideal core values of global companies stem from the Aristotelian code of ethics, including "the pursuit of global harmony and *eudoimonia*, the spread of economic democracy, the distribution of the benefits of globalization . . . and the material and spiritual prosperity of humankind" (Mourdoukoutas, 1999, p. 43). Further, organizational culture, governance, strategies, and training, which include valuing cultural diversity and understanding, are often discussed as important determinants in becoming a successful global company (Reeves-Ellington, 1995; Rhinesmith, 1991; Barnevik, 1994; Jackson, 1997; Palich & Gomez-Mejia, 1999; Cable, 1999; Gamble & Gibson, 1999). A global mindset is also considered important, which refers to managers who "do not limit their visions to a given country or region in deciding their value-chain management strategies or the attributes of the products they wish to manufacture or sell" (Prakash & Hart, 2000, p. 3). The popular phrase 'Think Globally'[7] is frequently used to illustrate the appropriate attitude

[7] 'Think Globally' is used almost too often in the business world. Kanter (1994) tries to clarify it by combining a concept of globalism, localism, and global competitiveness. He argues that global thinking is not concerned with international operation but with an integrated framework of all the business aspects.

necessary to work for an international or global company. Now that I have discussed how the process of globalization has influenced the nature of large corporations, as well as thoughts of employees who attempt to establish a successful global company. I will delineate a brief history of Japanese multinational companies' foreign investment in the US in order to capture their images and successes along with overt criticism across time.

2.3.3. A History of Japanese Multinationals in the United States

Japanese multinationals were not so prominent and successful in the beginning of their debut in the United States. Their profit and status were heavily affected, in both good and bad ways, by currency valuation, national regulation, and wars. The first Japanese multinational in the United States was Mitsui & Co., Ltd.; Mitsui opened its office in New York City in 1879. Before the First World War (1914), Japanese investment in the United States was about $25 million, compared to a total of $7.1 billion of foreign investment in the United States. Most of the Japanese direct investment was service-sector relating to trade, finance, shipping, and insurance. During the First World War and the interwar years, Japanese multinationals increased slightly, engaging in manufacturing, finance, petroleum, and transportation. However, by the 1930s, Japanese multinationals began to experience difficulties in operations due to low foreign exchange valuation and the Depression in the United States. The Second World War further changed the number of Japanese multinationals in the United States. The Alien Property Custodian, which was designed to take the properties of all

opponent countries, liquidated Japanese banks, insurance, and trading companies between 1942 and 1945 (Kuwahara, 1990; Wilkins, 1990).

After the Second World War, the Allied Occupation assisted Japan with its government restructure and economic reforms. It made a considerable impact on the future of the Japanese economy. The size of Japanese investment prior to the 1970s was still not impressive because higher wages and language discouraged the Japanese multinationals from expanding and opening manufacturing firms in the United States. However, the investment was still significant in the Japanese economy. While the United States began experiencing a deficit in trade balance, the devaluation of the dollar, and active protectionism in the 1970s, Japanese corporations realized that establishing manufacturing firms in the United States would be more economical than exporting from Japan. During the years in the 70's, Japanese electronic companies (SONY, Matsushita, Sanyo, Toshiba, Sharp, and Hitachi) began to open manufacturing facilities and acquire divisions of American companies. After this movement, Japanese multinationals became more visible than ever. Semiconductor companies actualized productive management by investing and purchasing American corporations. In the 1980s, Japanese automakers, such as Honda, Nissan, and Toyota, followed this wave and established manufacturing facilities in the US. Similarly, real estate, trading companies, and financial institutions broadened their investments by acquiring local companies (see Serapio, 1992; Scandura & Benerji, 1992; Wilkins, 1990).

In accordance with the expansion of Japanese multinationals, many people in the United States held misconceptions about and became frightened of

Japanese companies during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. The truth is that, in spite of large investments in the United States, Japanese multinationals made low returns. In 1988, Japanese multinationals were the second largest investors in the United States, following the United Kingdom. Although Japan seemed to have made a strong impression, the United Kingdom was still surpassing thirty percent of total foreign direct investment more than that of Japan. Japanese multinationals suffered significantly low returns in spite of their large investments (Wilkins, 1990). Regardless, fear of Japanese multinationals spread throughout the country. Japanese buyouts of MCA, Columbia Pictures, CBS Records, and fifty-one percent of the Rockefeller Center created a great sense of threat in the United States and accentuated Americans' hostile feelings toward Japan. New phrases for American perceptions such as "Japan-bashing" or "Japanphobia" among Americans were highlighted at this time. The fear, however, dissolved when the American economy was restored and the Japanese economy declined in the late 1990s (Wilkins, 1990).

As this glimpse of the history of Japanese multinationals in the United States shows, their motivations for investment shifted over time. In early stages, Japanese multinationals were mostly related to the service-sector, assisting trade between Japan and the United States and their business. When the devaluation of the dollar occurred, Japanese realized that it would be prudent to manufacture products in the United States rather than paying high cost for shipping and dealing with protectionism, for they could manufacture products with lower costs and hire skilled laborers in the US. Overall, providing services and parts to Japanese

customers, resolving trade friction between Japan and the United States, obtaining low costs of materials and land, high technology, and labor became the main determinants for Japanese multinationals to expand their business in the United States (Lifson, 1987).

This overview of Japanese multinationals in the United States shows when and why Japanese began investing, how the size of their investment changed, and what brought the change. Despite the fact that Japanese multinationals suffered while establishing their business in the United States, they needed to stay competitive in the world market and the US was one of the best places for resources and advances in technology. They also had to recover the negative images labeled as “shadow” or “shogun” management, which implies inflexibility of adapting to an American way of business (Lifson, 1987; Byham & Dixon, 1993). Consequently, Japanese multinational companies were challenged to maintain some of their positive original practices, while learning to work and communicate effectively with local people, in order to stay productive and successful in the world. In the following section, I will review relevant studies on Japanese multinationals in the United States that tend to show their flexibility and inflexibility in their managing and communicating behaviors.

2.3.4. Studies of Japanese Multinational Companies, Communications, and Related Works

There is a growing number of studies on Japanese multinational corporations. As a matter of fact, Japan is one of the most frequently studied countries, including the United Kingdom, the US, and Germany, in terms of international human resource management in the last twenty years (Clark, Glant,

& Heijltjes, 2000). In particular, many scholars are interested in finding out whether Japanese unique management styles, such as lifetime employment, decision-making styles, seniority systems, and quality circles are transferable to other countries (e.g., Gill & Wong, 1998; Andeso-Diaz, Kawamura, et al., 1999; Abdullah & Keenoy, 1995; Recht, & Wilderom, 1998). Furthermore, some researchers, who like to identify successful multinational companies, are concerned with how much Japanese companies are trying to localize their practices or how much they do not (e.g., Beechler & Bird, 1994; Taylor, & Beechler, et al., 1996; Beechler & Allan, 1994; Taylor, 1999; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994; Kranias, 2000; Mroczkowski, Linowes, & Hanaoka, 1992). However, Clark et al. (2000) argue that many studies use Hofstede's cultural dimensions to interpret the results in explaining cultural differences or similarities, despite the fact that his work is limited.[8] As a result, those studies fail to investigate other realities that reflect the precise nature of conflicts, disparities, or resemblances.

Compared to the vast volume of research on Japanese managerial practices, there are few studies that address intercultural communication in a multicultural organization setting (Shuter & Wisemen, 1994). I previously introduced Paulk and Sunaoshi's studies in multinational organizations, which stem from linguistic and sociolinguistic disciplines. In the next section, I will

[8] For example, a sampling across forty nations from one organization does not represent the whole population of each country. A strictly number-oriented questionnaire cannot fully reveal a deeply embedded system of values and norms. In addition, it ignores the notion of existing subcultures in certain countries (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Furthermore, a recent ethnographic study shows incompatibility between its data and Hofstede's (Dlribarne, 1996).

review more studies pertinent to my own which focus on communication issues, including those that originate from business and management perspectives.

Management styles seem to highly affect communications between Japanese and American employees. Tolich and Kenney (1999) studied three different Japanese multinationals in the US and identified different management styles. Although their study was concerned with determining the extent to which these Japanese subsidiaries were dominated by management practices of Japan or America, or combinations of the two, it also involved some communication issues between Japanese and American employees. For example, in a Japanese-dominant transplant, the Japanese assignee presence was strong because the parent company wanted to control the capital investment and the company was the first subsidiary established outside Japan. Some discrepancies were found between American and Japanese managers. Japanese employees had the impression that American managers learned the Japanese system well; however, they were unwilling to share their opinions with the Japanese. On the other hand, American employees showed frustration claiming that the Japanese were not flexible, that it took awhile for the Americans to be considered accountable, and that *nemawashi* (negotiation before a decision is made) hindered Americans' involvement in decision-making. Furthermore, Japanese managers' way of relying on their subordinates' autonomy and experiences created tensions. While American employees looked for clear and explicitly stated goal-oriented direction, follow-ups, and reviews from their managers, Japanese managers expected their subordinates to learn from their experience without being given clear direction.

Thus, Americans were expected to adjust themselves to the Japanese management culture in the Japanese-dominant company.

In an American-dominant transplant, the presence of Japanese assignees was minimal. Rather than following Japanese management styles, the management team, comprised predominantly of Americans, did not receive any support or encouragement from the parent company in Japan. Both American and Japanese employees were expected to get along. Everyday interactions between Japanese and Americans were scant. They did not interact much in meetings or casual communication. Nor did Americans explain or introduce American norms to the Japanese. Instead of using *namawashi* in the company, a typical American top-down decision-making style was utilized, and the Japanese managers were excluded from decision-making meetings. Further, the American managers were not aware of language difficulties and problems that the Japanese experienced deciphering their speech. Thus, in spite of Japanese ownership, Japanese management style, identity, and ideas were rejected and replaced with traditional American norms.

Lastly, in a hybrid transplant, both Japanese assignees and American employees' presences were strong in managerial key positions. Managers from two different cultures shared experiences and established "a blend of East and West, and hopefully the best of everything" (p. 601). The company provided a two-day teamwork exercise once a year to new employees, which aimed at socializing the employees according to the company visions. Moreover, the American managers learned to accommodate Japanese communication styles; for

example, one communication style includes long pauses in conversations, and the managers learned that that they did not have to fill in those pauses. They also recognized the Japanese managers' English limitations and found ways to communicate successfully with them by using only a few words, numbers, and drawings. These strategies are also apparent in Sunaoshi's study (1999). *Nemawashi* is less used in meetings, but one American manager found it favorable because it could shorten meetings. Further, decisions could be made much more quickly than in the parent company in Japan. The hybrid company, therefore, developed the management styles that were combinations of or the best of both Japanese and American features. The negotiated or hybrid Japanese companies in the US are also discussed in studies by Brannen (1994) and Sumihara (1992).

Even though the main focus of Tolich and Kenney's study was to examine a variety of management styles in Japanese subsidiaries in the US, it also describes how management styles might influence communication between Japanese and American employees. In the Japanese-dominant company, American managers were frustrated with Japanese ways of management, while Japanese managers thought that the Americans were learning Japanese styles successfully. In the American-dominant company, rejections of transferring Japanese ideas, as well as interacting with the Japanese, were found. Although all employees were expected to get along with one another, less consideration and attention were given to non-native speaking problems. Lastly, in the hybrid transplant, the Americans learned Japanese communication styles and employed

various ways to get their points across. Thus, success or failure in intercultural communications seems to be also determined by management styles. If Japanese management styles are prevalent, Americans are frustrated with them and Japanese are disappointed with the lack of contribution from the Americans. In the same way, if American management styles predominate, cross-cultural interactions decrease, no special attention is paid to non-native speakers, and Japanese feel excluded from their management circles, while Americans enjoy their freedom. The interactants' experiences, such as feelings of exclusion or frustration, in such different organizations might influence attitudes toward and success in communicating with others. Tolich and Kenney's study indicates the impossibility of disconnecting an organizational reality from intercultural experiences.

A quantitative study by Watanabe and Yamaguchi (1995) showed stereotypical perceptions prevailing in a Japanese multinational company. They examined how British employees in Japanese-owned financial (white-collar) companies in the UK perceived Japanese expatriates. The researchers' basic assumption was that cultural and attitudinal differences would cause problems in the area of communication. On the positive side, some British employees perceived Japanese expatriates to be loyal to the organization, trustworthy, competent, patient, and fair. On the negative side, other British employees saw the Japanese as secretive, indecisive, mistrustful, and difficult to understand. Furthermore, the study indicated that higher the British employees' positions were and the longer they had worked for the Japanese companies, the more they

perceived Japanese assignees negatively. Since this study was conducted through survey, no specific contexts were available to interpret the results. However, the authors maintain that British employees' negative perceptions of Japanese assignees are consistent with stereotypes of Japanese that are frequently depicted in mass media. British employees' perceptions of 'not trusting others' and 'difficult to understand' are likely attributed to Japanese communication styles that avoid verbalizing everything and rely on reading non-verbal behaviors. The authors also argue that the descriptions of 'secretive' and 'indecisive' are the results of Japanese decision-making styles and ways of sharing information.

Conflicting concepts of the job were also revealed in a Japanese multinational company. Kleinberg (1989) examined different conceptualizations of jobs perceived by Japanese and Americans in Japanese subsidiaries in the United States. Many Americans expected to see clear goals and responsibilities set out for them and experienced frustration and uncertainty due to the lack of description about their position. Americans were not able to find expected correspondence between the given titles and responsibilities, rights, authority, and pay scale. For example, one's title and responsibilities might be upgraded but with little financial reward. When Americans were ready to accept personal risk with their responsibilities, Japanese companies did not allow them to take a risk on their own. This dissonance about positions seemed to lead to constant disagreement and frustration. However, many Japanese and Americans expressed an enjoyment of their efforts to understand each other's societal and organizational differences and strove to construct synergistic work strategies.

While some Americans enjoyed having flexibility in their positions, responsibilities, and actions, many Japanese were pleased to have more responsibility and independence than they could find in their home country. Some negative reactions described by the Americans were Japanese ambiguity, incompetence, untrusting, and disrespectful attitudes. In contrast, Americans' lack of commitment, loyalty, and a sense of teamwork, and inflexibility were cited by the Japanese. Negative perceptions toward Japanese employees were similar to those in Watanabe and Yamaguchi's study. However, Kleinberg's study shows a specific context (conceptualizations of one's job). It also demonstrates tacit cultural meanings which reflect a dialectic between Japanese and Americans when they map their behaviors in the workplace.

Various sources of communication difficulties and coping strategies in a Japanese subsidiary in the US were also identified (Kim & Paulk, 1994). For instance, language differences were the most serious cause of frustration and difficulties for Japanese and Americans in everyday interactions. Different communication styles were also sources of frustrations; the Japanese were ambiguous, unspoken, and depended on reading nonverbal behaviors, while the Americans were straightforward, explicit, and intolerant of unclear directions. The authors showed that different work styles, such as Japanese redundancy and American role delineation, also were a part of the problem. The Americans also mentioned Japanese indecisive attitudes with respect to decision-making in their use of time, use of *nemawashi*, and establishing consensus. On the other hand, the Japanese commented that Americans made decisions too quickly without

considering long-term effects. To handle these difficulties and differences, Japanese and Americans engaged in cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies. Cognitive strategies were employed to understand and gain knowledge about cultural differences. Affective strategies include being patient, open-minded, adaptable, and flexible. Behavioral strategies involve behavioral responses using either accommodation (e.g., listening carefully to others or adjusting speaking behaviors) or divergence with which people increase the distance from cultural others and avoid interacting with them.

The following two studies -- Marschan, Welch, & Welch, 1997 and Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999 --- were not conducted in Japanese multinational companies, but they revealed the significant role of language in the success of a multinational company. Both articles were written based on the same data (interviews, field notes, and observations) collected from a Finnish multinational company. The authors claimed that the role of language has been neglected in cross-cultural management studies. Their 1999 article demonstrated three perspectives on language: language as a barrier, language as a facilitator, and language as a source of power. Language as a barrier not only distorts communication but also prevented the building of horizontal relationships, establishing informal communication networks, speeding up the decision-making process, seeking advice and assistance, and gaining additional information. Furthermore, employees felt unwilling to attend training programs that were conducted in a different language due to their lack of language skills. Knowing Finnish or being a Finn (parent-country nationals) was likely to facilitate

communication flow and establish a casual network for dealing with sensitive information, whereas non-Finnish employees tended to be excluded from information exchange and the decision-making process. This led to the next dimension, language as a facilitator. If employees possessed relevant language skills, they were capable of forming a personal relationship with other nationals. Also, they were often sent for training and to meetings with foreign subsidiaries and gain networking opportunities. More important than the previous two perspectives, however, was the perspective on language as a source of power. The authors found out that the possession of required language skills opened up the gate to access critical information and lets employees had more power than their given positions and acted as a gatekeeper. The authors maintained that the power of language was hindered from a formal organizational structure and it actually influenced or even threatened the intended function that controls communication networks. The focus of these studies was especially important because they did not attribute a cause of communication distortion to specific cultures. More specifically, no cultural or national descriptions, such as Finnish as secretive or controlling, were mentioned. Rather, the authors claimed that language skills made a difference in controlling and gaining access to sensitive information, establishing relationships, and using power.

The studies of intercultural communications in organizational contexts revealed above contribute to understanding some issues that we should keep in mind when considering multinational companies. However, as I have mentioned repeatedly, we also have to keep in mind that not all problems originate from

cultural differences. Most of the studies I discuss here are based on interview data. People's narratives that are constructed through their experiences and interactions are valuable; however, we should remember that interviews give us what people think they do, not necessarily how they behave. For example, I have observed that one American employee could not change his pace of talking even after a Japanese assignee asked him to speak slowly, although he made a joke about the situation, saying, "Oh, I have to stop drinking coffee" to lesson the seriousness or hide his incompetence at accommodating his conversant. The American employee might have changed his pace; but he did not. The Japanese never made the same request of him in meetings. The problem is that the American's affective strategy did not work even though he might have thought that it did. Hypothetically, it may lead to another level of conflict for him: "It's difficult to communicate with Japanese although I try to speak slowly," or "the Japanese don't ask questions during the meeting, but they always ask me after, which wastes my time." My point is that interview data should be examined carefully in combination with other sources. Furthermore, problems and issues might stem from other areas, such as organizational structure, ideology, or conflicting roles.

2.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Up to this point, I have explained how intercultural communication has been studied, how the process of globalization has influenced corporations and expectations of people, and what communication issues were discussed in

multinational companies. Paying attention to the framework of my study (2.2.), I will propose the following research questions.

1. At the macro level, how has globalization influenced the form and values of a large organization as communicated to a subsidiary? How does the organization use the process of globalization to construct shared schemes of perceptions, values, and habitus which are conveyed to its overseas subsidiaries and set the expectations and goals? What kinds of aspirations are sought in organizational actors as a member of the global group?

Answers to this question will delineate relationality between an organization and the external world, between the parent company and its subsidiary, and between the organization and its employees. As much as a national culture might strongly affect an organization, it is also dependent on the external world as it tries to be global. The ideology of a parent company (macro) is germane to understanding the roots of its subsidiary. The examination of a parent company will also contribute to understanding the global picture of which a subsidiary is a part and in which employees might find the meaning of their identities and practices.

2. How does an overseas subsidiary try to incorporate its parent company's nationality, its values, practices, and habitus to create an ideal bicultural workplace for employees of two cultures? What kinds of practices are found? How are the practices handled by organizational actors from two cultures?

The local field is the place where employees actually engage in practices. The examination of the local field provides a clear picture of what is happening in the shared environment. At this level the company management is aware of blending national and cultural practices. A number of overt attempts are made to help employees adjust to each other. This question will discover practices that employees of two cultures find different and difficult to deal with and examine

cultural factors, such as ideology, socialization, or gender, that Scollon and Scollon (1995) raised to understand intercultural discourse at work.

3. At the micro level, what habitualizations of behaviors emerge in face-to-face communicative activities in a bicultural workplace?

A micro level of analysis is used to answer these questions by examining interactants' perceptions and communicative activities more closely in which people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact with one another. I will identify how employees try to make sense of cultural others and construct their identity. I will also investigate their interactions, describe how they do things together and differently, and identify bicultural patterns. Furthermore, I will contrast people communicating in Semicon US with people communicating between Semicon US and Japan Semicon using distance technology.

2.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant in several ways. First, unlike the majority of intercultural communication studies, which are actually *cross*-cultural communication studies (Scollon & Scollon, 1995), the current study observes natural intercultural communication in which people of different cultural backgrounds interact with one another as a two-way process. The purpose of the research is not to predict individuals' nationally or culturally bounded behaviors but to describe development of biculturalism in their workplace and to interpret their actual interactions in natural, specific contexts. This study explores complex human interactions where cultural factors, such as cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, genders, languages, expertise, common ground, interests, status,

power, ideology, and personal histories, are amalgamated in their ongoing two-way communications.

Second, the present study approaches the field neither with the view that all problems in intercultural situations stem from cultural, linguistic, and national differences, nor with the view that cultural differences do not exist or are never a problem. I do not take either side but believe both are possible factors. Intercultural communication studies using a social science approach often wrongly overemphasize interactants' geographic differences, specifically national groups. Such national and cultural differences are often treated as causes of misunderstanding, miscommunication, or communication conflicts among people from different cultures. Rather this study will provide new perspectives to ways people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds will be able to co-construct their shared reality and practices, which provides them with opportunities to negotiate and routinize how things should be done.

Third, the concept of habitus has not been considered in the study of intercultural communication before. Habitus and habitualization of perspective become especially important when people repeatedly interact with each other everyday in a given context in which they share the company's vision, ideology, goals, and purposes, regardless of their differing linguistic backgrounds. As Hanks emphasizes, people do not have to share the same language to communicate as long as they have the same view of what is happening in moment-by-moment interactions and co-participate in the activity. By engaging with others through familiarity of places, utterances, gestures, comments, and

situations, people habitualize their practices, views, and activities. This study shows how employees in Semicon US habitualize utterances and perspectives that were acquired through repetition and how habitus influences their intercultural experience.

Finally, three different levels of analysis used in this study will provide several advantages. I start the analysis with the effect of globalization on a multinational parent company (macro) to examine a relation between the organization and the external world and between its vision and globalization. Then, I explore its subsidiary (local) that is co-constructed under the parent company's vision in possession of two national roots. Finally, I examine employees' communication activities and behaviors (micro) within a shared local field. To my knowledge, no intercultural communication studies exist which examine the movement from organizational ideology to specific interactions. Combining these three analyses and making sense of employees' intercultural experiences might be challenging. However, I believe that this is the only way to get close to the complexity of intercultural communication.

Further, the interdisciplinary nature of this study will contribute to other fields, including international business management, organizational culture, human resource management, strategic management, globalization, and ethnographic research. Rich qualitative data is not often used in international business research. Even when it is used, it is rare to find careful examination of interactants' discourse and interactions along with managerial issues. Even though some anthropological or sociolinguistic studies explore day-to-day interactions,

they tend to neglect the possible effects of managerial practices, organizational issues, and globalization on them. This is also a good place to view how the process of globalization affects and shapes the organizational identity by altering structures and ideology. At the same time, it also controls business strategies and possibly individuals' conducts and discourse according to the ideal view of the globalized world. Thus, the present work represents co-constructed bicultural reality that employees of different cultural backgrounds participate while learning restrictions, rules, and ideology of the company in the process of globalization.

2.6. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I first discussed how the field of intercultural communication had begun in the US, and I reviewed different approaches that have been used in this field. Based on a considerable body of intercultural communication literature that uses social science approaches, we found that there was a need to conduct research without restricting the notion of culture to that of obstacle to and the major issue of intercultural communication. Some studies employing interpretive or interactive approaches have tried to break this trend and have found other factors that both prevent and enhance successful intercultural communication. I frame my study of Semicon US based on what I have learned from past studies and critics. Unlike other studies, the present study integrates a big picture (macro) approach to the company with a narrow (micro) focus on specific interactions, considering the concept of habitus that becomes especially critical when employees engage in everyday work and interaction through routinization.

Then, I explained the need to examine a Japanese subsidiary in the US and I reviewed a general understanding of globalization and differences between multinational and global companies. Implied in the meaning of the term globalization, people are expected to respect and understand other cultures. This assumption also influences what a global company should be like. A global company values diversity and enhances harmony and cooperation. Also, a brief history of Japanese subsidiaries in the US was given to understand how they struggled to succeed in a foreign country and how they changed over time. Furthermore, I reviewed some literature, including communication issues in Japanese subsidiaries or multinational companies, from international business management and communication disciplines. Watanabe and Yamaguchi's (1995) and Kim and Paulk's studies displayed consistent and stereotypical descriptions about Japanese managers who were assigned to Japanese foreign subsidiaries. Tolich and Kenney's study provided a different look at how communication activities might be influenced by the way a company is managed. Marschan-Piekari, et al. (1999) showed how language makes a difference in the control of information and power and in gaining support and knowledge from foreign colleagues, by not necessarily attributing a negative image to a certain nationality.

Proposing three research questions, but not restricted to these three, this study will explore different viewpoints on intercultural communication in a subsidiary of multinational company, which is going to be global, or at least pay attention to some areas that have been ignored or treated insignificantly or carelessly.

Chapter 3: Method

3.1. METHOD

As shown in the previous chapter, the majority of research on intercultural communication taking social science approaches considers nationality and ethnicity as taken-for-granted variables and determines the differences as a root of the problem. To avoid perpetuating those behavioral classifications and to go beyond categorizing people, it is imperative to examine moment by moment interactions in a specific context and to identify possible factors resulting in misunderstanding or leading to mutual understanding. Although quantitative research dominates in the study of international business, I believe that in-depth text analysis, discourse analysis, and observation of actual interaction among a smaller number of participants will also contribute to the study not only on intercultural communication but also international business from a different perspective. Davis and Henze (1998) propose the use of ethnographic methods in the area of cross-cultural pragmatics. Following the philosophy and goals underlying ethnographic work that Davis and Henze elucidate, I will consider basic assumptions of culture, communication, and the workplace as follows. Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic. Culture is born, maintained, and changed through communication. Therefore, culture and communication should be examined in specific contexts. For such cases, interpretive and interactional approaches are fundamental for understanding a way of thinking, talking, interacting in a specific context; in this case, a multicultural workplace.

Qualitative studies on organizations have been successful at uncovering the complexity and richness of organizational activities (Van Maanen, 1982; Newman & Benz, 1998; Berg, 1998; Weick, 1982; Rosen, 1991; Dlribarne, 1996).

I used triangulation of methods in the course of my fieldwork: participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. During the fieldwork, I served in both insider and outsider roles. As an insider, I participated in several activities. As a trainer (this will be explained later), I had several opportunities to interact with many employees in class. I received a couple of calls regarding some concerns that people were having and consulted with them. I helped translate some company materials from Japanese to English and vice versa whenever I had time. I also joined company activities, such as Thanksgiving dinner, birthday lunches, company picnics, and welcome/farewell dinners with people in human resources where I usually left my bag and used one of their computers and desks. Since I received an employee badge upon the beginning of my research, I was able to enter the building without checking in. As an outsider, I observed staff meetings, videoconferences, meetings for all employee, team leader meetings, and executive meetings, to name a few. I usually asked if I could observe a meeting before it started. Once the employees began to recognize me as an observer, I did not have to ask their permission. In this way, I maintained a moderate, balanced participation between an insider and an outsider (Spradley, 1980, p. 60).

An important ethnographer's recording system is fieldnotes. My fieldnotes included what people said or did during an interaction and sometimes my personal opinions and insights. While attending a meeting, I took notes during the meeting.

When I had nothing to do at the company, I often walked around in the building and saw what employees were doing. When I overheard conversation or noticed particular objects, I went back and wrote notes. I usually typed my notes at the end of the day at home although I sometimes recorded them in the office when someone's computer was available at the company. My fieldnotes accumulated approximately 350 pages in single space, from the first day I visited the company on August 18, 1998 to the last visit on February 13, 2002.

To sort the enormous amount of fieldnotes, I concentrated on how quickly and efficiently I could go back to particular situations, happenings, and utterances without losing contexts. Using a grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I identified themes in the fieldnotes. A total of one hundred and twenty themes arose. After collecting the themes, I entered them into excel sheets with dates of the fieldnotes in which those themes appeared. I named the themes by meeting names, informants' names, or phenomena, such as humor, politeness, or the use of Japanese by Americans. In this way, I was able to go back to a specific fieldnote whenever I wanted and use it for analysis.

Another method is the ethnographic interview (Spradley, 1979). I used interviews to probe uncertain issues that informants discussed, to hear workers' voices, to know more about their activities, and to understand issues that they did not show interactionally. Informal interviews were performed incidentally. For instance, after one meeting, I clarified some of the points or abbreviations that I could not understand during the meeting. I also asked brief questions about the result of the meeting to some participants. When I was walking around in the

building, I asked simple questions, such as “How are you?,” “Are you busy?,” or “How was your trip to Japan?” I sometimes ended up staying at someone’s desk or office for a quite while and asking about his/her project or things that I did not know. Such spontaneous, unplanned, informal interviews were not tape-recorded. The number of the informal interviews was countless.

On the other hand, a formal interview was conducted on schedule with specific questions that I had prepared prior to the meeting. I obtained a list of people’s names who were working for the company for more than a year from an administrative assistant in each department. I usually visited each person’s desk, explained my study, and asked if they were interested in having interview with me. Sometimes I emailed people whom I could not easily get in touch with due to their frequent business trips or meetings and asked for their cooperation and schedules. A meeting room in the company was reserved to conduct interviews. I had to interview several employees at their desks because they did not want to leave. Although there were times when the interviewees could not come because they got caught up in their work, none of them refused to have an interview with me when I asked.

When an interviewee came in the meeting room, I thanked him/her for his/her time, promised his/her confidentiality, requested that he/she fill out a demographic information form, and asked if it was all right with him/her to tape-record the interview requiring a signature on the human subjects form. I tape-recorded all of the interviews except for one because one informant was not used to being interviewed and did not feel comfortable talking in front of the tape-

recorder. Interviews were conducted in English for American employees and in Japanese for Japanese employees. The interviews usually took from a half an hour, the shortest, to one hour and ten minutes, the longest. The average was about fifty minutes.

I interviewed thirty-one American employees, one Japanese American, and fifteen Japanese expatriates, and two locally hired Japanese employees. I used nineteen one hundred and twenty minute tapes. I had prepared a set of questions that were different depending on whom I interviewed, for example, managers, administrative assistants, or Japanese expatriate, and the focus of the interview, such as a project on that the person was working. I used a semi-structured interview. Instead of asking all questions, I chose some based on how the informants would answer and concentrated on asking them to elaborate some points about which they were more concerned or felt strongly. Therefore, impromptu questions were frequent. Questions about what the informants had mentioned, done, or thought in the course of my observation were also asked for verification with the interview. All interviews were transcribed and categorized according to themes by the author.[9] Although it was possible to ask interviewees' opinions on effective communication styles, jokes, politeness, and causes of communication breakdown, I believe that the results would be more valid if real moment by moment instances or particular moments were found through the participant observation or videotaped interactions.

[9] Japanese interview quotes are translated by the author as well.

Additionally, discourse analysis of what actually has been said in natural interactions became a unique facet of this study because most of the international business and even intercultural communication studies tended to overlook or place little emphasis on this level of analysis. It is important to record what has been exactly said and scrutinize how conversation is carried on using specific expressions. This micro-analysis helped identify how power was distributed and how participants used interpretive and interactional resources to communicate with each other. Looking at data over and over again might also helped identify certain communicative patterns, styles, or strategies when members communicate with each other and try to express themselves successfully and unsuccessfully. This method brought different understanding of intercultural communication at a workplace.

The last method is document analysis. The document analysis was used to perceive how the company tried to communicate with employees and how employees were expected to behave and believe. Available resources were company newsletters, management philosophy booklet, quarterly company magazines, intranet, and an orientation packet. My main focus was on the president's words on New Year's and other occasions because they often revealed the future vision of the company. Discussions about organizational culture and globalization between the parent company's president and employees were also significant resources. Analysis of a new hire packet, diversity training, and advertisements and posters were examined as well. To sort all the data from the document, I typed all the relevant texts and categorized them into specific themes.

The document analysis helped understand the organization as a whole and also validated what I found based on participant observation and interviews.

Ultimately, all of the methods contributed to elucidating all research questions to some degree. There is no single question that requires only one method for explanation. All methods are inevitable and beneficial to validate findings in this study. Thus, I believe that the use of these multiple methods will help me find ways of understanding a complex amalgamated multinational organization and individuals.

3.2. RESEARCH SITE: JAPAN SEMICONDUCTOR CORPORATION OF USA (SEMICON US)

Semicon US, a wholly-owned subsidiary of a Japanese semiconductor company[10], was established in October 1994 to serve a headquarters for fifteen sales and services offices throughout the United States. Its parent company (Japan Semicon) began foreign investment to the US through a distributor of an American semiconductor company in the early 90's. After Semicon US took over the operations from the distributor, it quickly needed to build market share and improve its service reputation in the U.S. In the last seven years, the number of the employees increased from fifty to thirteen hundred[11], of whom approximately eighty employees are Japanese nationals. The sales proliferated 150 percent since its foundation. Sophistication of the products became well known in the US semiconductor industry as well. Semicon US is, thus, a young, fast growing, and renowned company in the US. Currently, in the Semicon US office in Springfield,

[10] The semiconductor industry is one of the most global industries today (Kimura, 1994).
[11] The number of employees and Japanese expatriates have both decreased in the time of recession.

there are approximately five hundred employees, including about fifty Japanese expatriates[12] and fifteen locally hired Japanese employees. The number of the Japanese expatriates in each department varies. As you can see in the Table 3.1, the president and vice presidents are Americans. Many American employees in functional units may not directly work with Japanese employees because their jobs are more related to regional or internal matters. In contrast, more Japanese expatriates are assigned in business units. Semicon US is a good place for my fieldwork because it is a company that is involved in the process of globalization with its parent company (Japan Semicon) and the employees are expected to communicate interculturally with cultural others on a daily basis.

[12] In Semicon US, Japanese employees who are assigned from the parent company are called "expats," a shortened word from "expatriates." Originally, expatriates indicate people who withdrew themselves from residence in their native country. However, in the business world, 'expatriates' is used for assignees from other foreign nationals who will eventually go back to their countries after three to five years of overseas assignment. In this sense, 'expatriates' has the same meaning as 'sojourners' who live in a place only temporarily. In this dissertation, I use the words expatriates and assignees interchangeably.

Table 3.1: Distribution of locally hired employees and Japanese expatriates

	Locally Hired Employees (Americans)	**Japanese Expatriates**	**Locally Hired Japanese Employees**
President	1	0	0
Senior Vice Presidents	2	0	0
Business Units			
BU 1	100	25	10
BU 2	32	6	0
BU 3	16	4	0
BU 4	25	4	1
BU 5	4	2	1
BU 6	12	0	0
Functional Units			
Operation	6	4	1
Marketing	19	2	0
Information System	25	0	1
Human Resources	10	2	1
Tech Publication	16	0	1
Customer Support & Training	40	0	0
EHS	12	0	0
Total	320	55	16

3.2.1. Preliminary Research

3.2.1.1. Contacting a Company

My first meeting with Japan Semiconductor Corporation of USA (pseudonym), I will call Semicon US, was not related to my dissertation project. In summer 1998, I was taking a class, "Consultation in Organization," taught by one of my committee members, Dr. Larry Browning. The final exam was to find a client and present my training program. I still remember how desperate I felt. I was a foreigner who barely knew anyone in this country. I kept questioning

myself who wanted to be my client. Trying to put aside my pessimistic feelings, I ran to the phone book as soon as I got home. Since my only training specialty was intercultural communication between Japanese and Americans, my targets were multinationals which have business in Japan. I listed such American multinational companies as IBM, Dell Computer, Motorola, and whatever companies sounded like Japanese, such as Canon, Mitsubishi, or Toshiba. The next morning, I sat in front of the phone and started calling each company. It was a hard task just to reach a right person. Some companies had their own trainers; therefore they did not need me. Even though I talked to someone who said/would pass information about my training to a person in charge, I did not receive a call. Without finding any clients, weeks had passed. Finally, I desperately asked Dr. Browning if I could do something else to substitute the final. He told me not to give up and try to call Japan Semiconductor Corporation of USA (Semicon US) of which I had never heard.

After I went home, I called the Semicon US and explained my intercultural communication training that I designed. A telephone dispatcher transferred my call to one of Human Resource managers (Tamora). I again explained my training. She told me frankly that it would be impossible for me to provide training because there was no budget available until next April. She would call me back after she talked about it with her manager who was on a trip that week. However, from her tone of voice and impossibility because of the budget, I was sure that I was not going to receive a call from her. Meanwhile, one of the companies I contacted returned my call and I was able to set a time to meet for my presentation. After presenting my training program and receiving a final

grade for the class, I almost forgot about my call to Semicon US. However, a few weeks later, Tamora called me back and told me that her manager (Jill) was interested in hearing about my training. Although I did not have to present my training program anymore since I successfully completed the course, I decided to meet with Jill. Before visiting the company, I looked up the company websites to familiarize myself with its service and operation.

On the day of meeting, I found the name of the company on the side of the road after a seemingly long journey by car. As I drove up a gentle hill, I suddenly saw a long flat building under a blue sky - exactly what I had seen on the web. A mixed feeling of joy, excitement, and fear came to me all the sudden. I had an inspiration that it would be very nice if I could study this company as I hoped when I entered Ph.D. program. However, not to make myself disappointed later, I told myself that it would be all right even if the company did not show interest in my training. I parked my car in a visitor's parking space and entered the building. Up to this point, I hardly realized that I was approaching the Japanese multinational because the persons I was contacting were all Americans. Yet, as soon as I stepped into the lobby, there was no way not to know that this was a Japanese company. A life-sized Japanese statue was standing in the middle of the lobby as if it were showing some kinds of Japanese spirits. With confusion, I checked in at the front desk, received a visitor's badge, and told the operator that I had an appointment with Tamora.

3.2.1.2. Entering the Company

HR manager, Jill, showed her interest in my intercultural communication training and started to plan how she was going to implement it. It took a while until the first test training was finally carried out in February 1999. In the meantime, I interviewed some employees and learned about their concerns, interests, and expectation in the training. After the second training in October 1999, Jill asked me to consider providing a one-day training for managers. I agreed with this plan and also asked Jill if I could study the company for my dissertation. She informally told me that it would be no problem. I submitted a formal letter of permission in February 2000 and finally received a temporary employee badge the next month that allowed me to freely come and go.

Chapter 4: Global Field

Changes in technology and business environment have been occurring remorselessly in the past decades. As much as a parent company influences its subsidiary, it is affected by the external environment. As the purpose of understanding a shared reality of a Japanese subsidiary in the US, I will examine relationality between the parent company and globalization and analyze power of the parent company to make change in the organizations. Organizations involve a cognitive map, which contains symbols, myths, and ideologies, and communicate with employees about their cultural meanings (Reilly & DiAngelo, 1990). This chapter will unveil a global ideology which is followed and challenged by the local field where actual intercultural communication is taken place. This serves to illustrate a macro picture, which underlies the analysis of the local field and a micro analysis of intercultural communication later on. Relationality becomes an important concept to understand the language and context. Relationality is defined as:

> the reciprocal influence exerted by two different elements that are reflexively characterized by two different elements that are reflexively characterized by each other. More specifically, it refers to the mutual relationship that language – as well as thought – comes into contact with in sociocultural and situational contexts. (Maynard, 1997, p. 17)

To understand a linkage between language and context in intercultural communication in a local field (Semicon US), the overview of the Japanese parent company is critical to decipher what its overseas' subsidiary inherits from it, for there are two aspects of intercultural communication (1) between the subsidiary

and the parent company and (2) within the subsidiary. Since the parent company (Japan Semicon) and its subsidiary (Semicon US) are interdependent, influences to and from each other should not be neglected.

Japan Semicon and Semicon US have inevitable conditions in which power can be exercised; interdependence, resource scarcity, differences in point of view, and importance (Pfeffer, 1992). Interdependence is sufficient to develop power relations because successful organizations depend on their interdependent elements, such as members' common goals and ways of doing things, strong incentives to work together, and shared assumptions. Resource scarcity promotes interdependence. Japan Semicon has expertise and experiences in semiconductor equipments more than Semicon US does. In contrast, Semicon US deals with powerful customers and has potentials to grow and gain profits more than Japan Semicon does. The following two conditions will become clearer in the next chapter. A need to create and exercise power arises especially when members are interdependent and have different interests or point of view. People or the organization with power might reserve the use of influence for important issues. With this interdependence and power relationship in mind, I will analyze cultural aspects and practices of the Japanese parent company which has power over providing a shared ideology, visions, norms, goals, and the sense and the meaning of belonging to the Semicon group.

4.1. GLOBALIZATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Organizations are open systems that obtain inputs from their external world in order to produce outputs and to survive. In other words, organizations

are dependent on their environment, and the relationship between organizations and their external worlds is a complex web of interdependence (Trice & Beyer, 1993). As stated earlier, globalization is a phenomena happening in the world. Many organizations are affected by this globalized process, and multinational companies, specifically, have acquired flexible attitudes to move with this change. They adapt this flexible posture by receiving the change and incorporating it in their systems. A parent company has power to change its overall structures, ideology, and culture. Mumby (1988) argues that power is both product and process of constructing reality in organizations. In his words:

> Power is not simply a part of organizational structure; rather, it is both medium and outcome; it is both enabling and constraining. Power, in essence, is both a product of organizational activity and the process by which both a product of organizational activity and the process by which activity becomes institutionally legitimated. Organizational interaction is therefore not something that takes place within the (power) structure of an organization, but is rather the process through which structure is created, reproduced, and changed. (p. 63).

Ideology plays an integral role in producing individual consciousness and structural domination. Ideology functions as a means of securing and legitimizing hegemonic organizational meaning and structures which support the interests of people with power and suppress those of individuals without power. Through ideology, power becomes a product and consequence of structures in organizations and process which creates, sustains, and positions the frame of organizational reality (Mumby, 1988).

Under the urgency of globalization, the first and foremost change might occur with a location of the company. An organization might increase the number of their offices and subsidiaries, and it might move to a more appropriate city,

region, and nation that can provide more profit or ensure their survival. Japan Semicon's initial "must" step of internationalization began with the wave of their Japanese customers' overseas business development. As Japan Semicon's Japanese customers moved overseas, Japan Semicon started shipping their internally developed and manufactured products abroad. At the beginning, the company used the channels of US electronics suppliers as distributors to sell their waves, mainly because the name of Japan Semicon was not well known in the US market. However, as the purchase of Japan Semicon systems increased and it became a principle supplier, its customers asked for direct support from its engineers. Along with this request, overseas expansion of its sales and engineering support became a major priority. More specifically, local subsidiaries were vigorously established in the U.S., Europe, South Korea, Taiwan, and nine other countries since 1994.

The location change or expansion is also critical to obtain input and resources to generate profitable output and win the world competition. Although it depends on the kinds of business, global competitive industry, such as automobile, semiconductor, or computer, are involved in the globalization process. Semiconductor equipment will be outdated within a two-to-three year cycle these days. In such a fast moving industry, flexibility and sensitivity toward change are inevitable to survive in the 21st century. As the semiconductor industries become global, Japan Semicon needed to move out of Japan to search out the advanced technologies and offer the best products to win the world market. The advancement of an overseas network of development and production

bases were strengthened by establishing manufacturing plants mainly in the US, where the technology is most progressive.

The next seemingly affected area in multinational organizations involved in globalization is their structures. If globalization is a set of forms, the organizations cannot avoid changing their structures. The business environment and the technical revolution changed the value of the global economy, the distribution of wealth, and capital market in ownership of companies' stocks. The corporation focused on fixed and stable stockholders; however, now it has been shifting to institutional investors and individual investors who control personal capital. These changes influence corporations by making them realize that they have to manage business from the shareholders' point of view reflecting the global standard of policies and strategies. The organizational structure has to be clear to shareholders and open, flat, and transparent to allow quick decision making under a small operation, at the right location, and by the right people to react to changes in the external world. Japan Semicon top management implemented a management structure reform in 1998 to promote the globalization of its management. It was when the company expected rapid increases in market scale, intensified mega competition, and more diversity in customers' business strategies in forthcoming years. Unlike conventional Japanese economic systems that have been relatively unclear from the outside, Japan Semicon felt a need to provide a clear vision of the company.

A critical management system is the "Corporate Senior Staff" (C.S.S.) which designs and determines global strategies, promotes speedy management,

and takes responsibilities in implementing those strategies and earning positive results. The C.S.S. must be representatives of group companies with expertise and experience regardless of their nationality or seniority. Currently, there are thirty C.S.S., including four members from Korea, Taiwan, Europe, and the United States. The aim is for thirty percent of the C.S.S. to be foreign personnel in near future.

A product-specific Business Unit (B.U.) system had been introduced to speed up the decision making process. Business Units function in a worldwide group organization with a vertical management structure. Business Unit General Managers are appointed at the top of each B.U. Each B.U. is responsible for proposing, determining and implementing its own business, product, manufacturing, and development strategies, and managing its plan and budget. The B.U. General Managers and management staffs in each B.U. must exercise the necessary authority and take responsibility for profits and losses on the global business base. This B.U. system was particularly created in order to speed up the decision-making process through a large-scale transfer of authority.

Further, the role of subsidiaries of the group is clarified in terms of information sharing. Overseas subsidiaries, specifically, need to share their business plan and their strategies with each B.U. across the areas and countries. Japan Semicon's overseas subsidiaries are representatives but not distributors because the top management seeks subsidiaries' integration with the parent company rather than independence from it.[13]

[13] The assumption underlies that if the headquarters and distributors develop disparate thinking and intentions, it will be difficult to achieve effective global business advancement. Not only does the integration of the development, manufacturing, management and service areas among Japan

These location and structural changes are apparent transformation of multinational organizations. Along with this, the organizations also need to handle soft or human sides of change – organizational shared values.

4.2. GLOBALIZATION AND SHARED VALUES

Globalization influences organizations' values, norms, and philosophy to modernize their ways of thoughts and beliefs by adjusting their traditional or domestic focus. The more organizations involve employees of diverse backgrounds, the more they are challenged to seek shared values. Those values need to be recognized on a global base as well. A parent company has power to reset them.

4.2.1. Management Philosophy

In the last few decades, threats to quality, health, and safety motivated universal management standardization. Since 1992, a number of metastandards have emerged, including the International Organization for Standardization (IOS) 9000, the US Federal Sentencing Guidelines, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Increased penalties and sentences for violating federal and environmental laws prompted a number of organizations to install standard management systems. The popularity of such metastandards has risen because for two reasons. First, most of the firms wanted the certificate. The compliance certificate not only reduces costs that accrued performing on-site audits of suppliers or risking bad quality in their products, but also demonstrates

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Semicon Groups formulate integrated solutions to customers, but also new technology, operating methods, and new value will be created together.

the supplier quality. Secondly, the certificate guarantees stakeholders or investors that the company's environmental management system, internal financial controls, or safety management systems are sufficient (Uzumeri, 1997). This external force has power to change organizational foremost philosophy.

Japan Semicon believed in customer satisfaction, which had been inherited from its founders. It cannot be exaggerated to assert that Japan Semicon's keys to success from competition with the major trading companies or even survive in a difficult era was their focus on customers' needs. This spirit of service[14] had been the foremost priority in Semicon US for almost forty years; however, it was changed to safety first (Environment, Health, and Safety - EHS) in 2000. The company realized that it was no longer enough to focus solely on their customer, but that it was important to care employees and environments as a shared focus to be recognized as a "Genuinely Global Company," and attract shareholders' attention. Safety is a very basic and shared human need across cultures as it is placed on the second important needs, after physiological needs, in Moslow's motivation hierarchy. It is not a difficult concept to be understood by anyone; however, it needed to be replaced with the traditional value of customer satisfaction, which had been emphasized for forty years.

To implement safety issue, Japan Semicon created intensive programs and artifacts and used variety of methods to suggest this change. Everyone in the

[14] Under this policy, employees have to prevent at anytime from damaging or destroying relationships with their customers which their predecessors had established before. Accordingly, employees' commitment is requisite to gain customer satisfaction and trust through understanding and fulfilling customers' needs and wants, interacting with them with respect and a faithful, honest, polite, and kind attitude, and taking full responsibility for one's own action.

Japan Semicon group worldwide is obligated to take a minimum of one day-long basic safety class. This “Safety First” policy was meticulously and repeatedly reinforced by placing posters in each section throughout the companies’ locations and by distributing an individual ID-sized card that employees can carry with them everywhere they go. Posters and individual cards are translated not only into Japanese and English but also into Korean, Mandarin, and Cantonese for anyone working for/with the Japan Semicon group so that all those involved with Japan Semicon may have an awareness of this policy. The president especially insists on creating a work environment where everyone shares knowledge about safety. This way, the parent company tries to instill shared knowledge about safety, protect humanitarian interests, improve employees’ productivity and work environment, and become a legitimate corporation.

Japan Semicon’s consideration of global environment as well as the safety and health of its employees, customers, and anyone who is directly and indirectly connected with its business is thus fundamentally influenced by external interest, demand, needs, trend, concern, and request from outside of the company. It is critical for a global company to establish itself as an organization that can be accepted and recognized as a legitimate entity not only from a local or domestic standard but also from a global standard. The importance of the safety issue was emphasized in speeches made by the presidents of Japan Semicon and Semicon US during company meetings, and in newsletters, quarterly magazines, and websites. One of the employees who was in charge of EHS in Japan Semicon stated in the special issue of EHS in the company magazine, “With the importance

of EHS now being discussed at the global level, it is critical for us to be keenly aware of the changing paradigms to meet emerging needs appropriately." Japan Semicon proactively reacted to the urgency and requirement that all of society cares for and change its corporate value for the environmental and human health concerns and for the better recognition of the company. Meticulous practices for internalizing the safety value increased the awareness of safety among the employees. Japan Semicon believes that its dedication to EHS will earn customer trust, promote further growth and development, contribute to employees' welfare, and attract stakeholders, which contribute to yielding greater profits for the long term.

Although a global interest and legitimacy might be significant to step into the globalization of the company, the original values do not have to be discarded as long as the top management and employees consider them still pertinent, essential, and key to success. In other words, a way of emphasizing the traditions can be weakened due to new ideas, but it can become a secondary focus and exist innately. Although Japan Semicon's major focus became safety, it still strongly believes that customer satisfaction is an important business strategy. This belief is maintained with other philosophies, such as respect for people, technology leadership, and profit-oriented, which are also maintained in the management philosophy booklet and through the president's speeches.

4.2.2. Legend and Global Actors

Legends - historical narratives, cultural messages, and cultural ideologies, portray wonderful events and they are used by organizational members to make

sense of their experiences (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Legends might also tell about the kinds of organizational actors the organizations are looking for. The legend is likely to become a practice and power to shape the image of the organization and individuals. People are the source of success and the future of the company. An organization cannot survive without inspired people. Shared beliefs and images of a successful member of the group need to be communicated repeatedly after employees enter the corporate world.

In Japan Semicon, the legend serves as the source of ideal employees and it is told and retold to motivate the employees and communicate what kinds of personnel are valued and sought. The legend of Japan Semicon is about its founders. Japan Semicon was launched not so long ago by a few entrepreneurs who were filled with the spirit of adventure, frontier, and challenge. No more than forty years ago when IC (Integrated Circuit) technology had not been fully introduced to Japan, two ordinary young salaried men, one in his mid twenties and the other in his early thirties, left their jobs from a major general trading company and founded Japan Semicon. They were ordinary was in the sense that they were of no difference from a typical salaried man. What were unordinary about them, however, were that they started a business with nothing but enthusiasm, challenge, courage, and youth.[15] Japan Semicon highly values these unordinary characteristics of the founders and uses them to persuade employees to become like the founders to globalize the company.

[15] To note, it is extremely difficult for a venture company to succeed in Japan due to a tendency to establish a business relationship based on the name of major, traditional, and well-known enterprises. Acknowledging this hurdle, Japan Semicon business was initiated in the early sixties with a capital of 5 million yen (approximately 13,889 dollars with a fixed rate of one dollar equaled to 360 yen at that time) sponsorship by a major company.

A shared term to sum up the unordinary characteristics is entrepreneurial spirit by communicating creativity, flexibility, vitality, determination, and a sense of responsibility. Entrepreneurial spirit is also one of the core management philosophies appearing in the booklet. Japan Semicon habitually uses this phrase to insist that the employees not only be followers of the change but also become leaders who drive to create the new values and generate a technological revolution.

Related to the unordinary characteristics of the founders, the shared phrases youthful spirit or youthful energy is used to explain a part of characteristic of entrepreneurial spirit and explicitly address that age is not an important factor for promotion. Youthful energy is repeatedly emphasized to pursue one's dream. The president once read a poem about youth by Samuel Ullman to illustrate the real meaning of youth, which is related not to one's age but to one's spirit:

> Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind. It is a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions, a predominance of courage over timidity of the appetite of, for adventure over love of ease. Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years; people grow old by deserting their ideas.

The written materials, such as management philosophy book, which state successful characteristics, are not enough to inspire people. They need to be verbally communicated over and over again. Japan Semicon realizes the importance of individuals and encourages employees to be motivated from the very first day of their employment. The president made a speech to new employees in 1998 and encouraged them to:

> attach great importance to free thought and creativity, remaining unbound by fixed ideas, and instill passion and purpose into your every endeavor. I look forward to you making the most of your creativity and passion in your work. I look forward to seeing you who take the responsibility of Japan Semicon which leads the world technological innovation and its particular business field in the approaching 21st century. I hope you will contribute to the realization of the company's further growth.

Similar messages are also transmitted to existing employees through informal discussion between four representatives from young employees, usually who have five to six years working experiences at Japan Semicon, and one of CEOs. The president told young employees in a roundtable discussion[16]:

> What I hope to see in young people is the adventurous spirit to actively pursue your aspirations and even what may seem like unrealistic dreams to others. Without those qualities, I cannot envision the company sustaining its growth. I hope that the company steers clear of a bureaucratic approach and sustains an energetic and progressive atmosphere at all times.

Even when the legend is not told, the characteristics exist. They appear in different words and phrases through the president's speeches and CEO's comments during roundtable discussions while maintaining the core meaning. Vitality, creativity, speed, dynamism, ownership, the spirit of initiative, passion, responsibility, free thought, flexibility, sincere response, energetic mind, a spirit of challenge, an ability to act and dream, enthusiasm, independence, and risk taking are the terms used in Japan Semicon by not repeating the same phrase entrepreneur spirit or youthful energy. This way, the company can avoid too many repetitions of the same phrases (improvisation of habitus) and still sounds new

[16] A roundtable discussion is conducted in Japan Semicon to be cited in a company quarterly magazine. The magazine is available in both Japanese and English versions and on the intranet.

and stimulating while seeking the same desirable characteristics and actions sought in employees.

Ideal characteristics for the organization need to be modified according to the change occurring in the world – globalization. The more a company expands its business internationally, the more it develops diversity. In such circumstances, employees need to consider things not from a single point of view but from multiple perspectives. As Japan Semicon has gone overseas, it has added more characteristics which can handle rapid change in the world. It introduced several qualities since 1994 including the notion of globalization; speed, dynamism, and ownership. With speed, employees engage in vigorous action, responding to the breathtaking change that has been taking place in the industry. With dynamism, employees measure one's work based on not the domestic or local but the global market standard. With ownership, they accept challenges and the responsibility they take in their own work. Furthermore, studying in a diversified range of fields, learning the diversity of culture, and appreciating various viewpoints are always important and valuable in a global workplace. The president of Japan Semicon addressed the importance of sensitivity to other cultures and flexibility in their approaches as a prerequisite to become a global organizational actor in the Japan Semicon Group. This way, ideal and expected characteristics and attitudes are instilled in the company.

4.3. GLOBALIZATION AND MARGINALIZATION

Globalization does not lead to either unification or homogenization, yet it may lead to a form of relativization in which uniqueness or particularities of the

groups appear as a contrast with others (Papastergiadis, 2000; Robertson, 1992). As Clifford argues, the loss of authenticity might occur when "local authenticities meet and merge in transient urban and suburban settings," although the world is not populated by endangered authenticities (1988, p. 4). The world "makes space for specific path through modernity" (Clifford, 1988, p. 5). Organizations might be able to preserve their originality or authenticity, as a result of "discourse in global power systems" (Clifford, 1988, p. 11), while maintaining harmony on the global stage. Isolation from the global or local standard may help construct organizational members' identity, influence their attachment, and turn into attraction as well.

Marginalization occurs in contrast with others, which might be other groups, nations, and cultures. Japan Semicon demonstrates its particularity by contrasting its nation, Japan. It is often considered as Americanized or unconventional. One pamphlet indicated that Japan Semicon was established based on a simple philosophy "Let's make a company in which anyone can say whatever he/she wants to say." This is distinctive from a traditional Japanese way of communicating. Moreover, there has been a recent phrase in Japan Semicon that 'the nail that sticks up will be pulled out' as opposed to an old Japanese saying, 'the nail that sticks up will be hammered down.' The CEOs encouraged the employees to make the point clear and stand for what they believe right. As a part of the corporate culture, one CEO made a joke saying, "There were more outspoken people before. In fact, there were many who were just too outspoken,

and ended up being hyper active in the company." The opposition from a conventional look in Japanese society shows particularities of Japan Semicon.

Then, a next question comes up, "What are you?" Organizations need to find their identity in a unique way. In Japan Semicon's case, if it is not really Japanese, is it American? Not quite. Japan Semicon did not believe that the global standard was the American standard, as it was clearly stated in its pamphlets. The company believes in its uniqueness that cannot be emulated by other companies. Their shared goal and shared phrase is "Only One" company, meaning that only Japan Semicon can provide the highest quality products and lead the world's semiconductor technology. Their aim goes beyond Japan and the US by retaining good business practices in Japan and Asia, incorporating the best of the West, and eliminating negative areas of their practices. Their notion of globalization is integration of mainly Japanese and American business practices because headquarters are located in those two countries.

Marginizations or particularities need to be recognized by organizational members to give a baton pass to a next generation. Members use contrasting features to describe their unique organization. For example, a thirty-year old Japanese design engineer, who worked in Japan for five years and assigned to the US, says:

> *Ikani kenngen ga kojin ni yudanerareteruka toyuuno o jijyoo ni kannjimasita ne. Kihon teki ni meekaa kankei no gyoumu dato mukashikara arujanaidesuka. K toka yuutokoro wa hitotsu zumen kaite, kanntan na shorui demo inkan ga ippai tsuite itanndesuyo ne. Kakari-cho, ka-cho tte yuunowa sugoku kichin to mirundesuyone. Aru imi ugoki wa waruin desukedo, Jyapan Semikon tte yuu nowa jibun ichimai de kaita shorui to yuunoga sonomama sugu okyakusan ni deteshimaundesune. Kihonteki ni misu shitemo, jyoshi to yuu nowa amari kainyuu shinai. Maa,*

> *ayamari ni ikutoki wa issho ni ikimasu kedo, jibun de mata kaigi hiraite sooyuu no kojin de shinaito ikenain desuyo. Sooyuuimi dewa jiyuu de atte sukina koto dekirundesukedo, nanika atta toki wa sekinin wa owanaito ikenaindesu. Ryokyokutan desune. Boku mitaina shitappa ni risuponshibiritee wo motasete nandemo yarasete kureru, to. Sorewa ii desune.*
>
> I strongly felt how much authority was passed on to individuals. In a Japanese company K or other manufacturers [long-established companies], for instance, if you drew a spec design, even if the design is simple, the document would be filled with a number of managers' *inkan* (personal seals or stamps). People who are in managerial positions look closely at the document. In a sense, it slows the process down. But in Japan Semicon, the document I drew myself goes directly to my customer. Even when I make mistakes, my managers won't interfere. Although when I have to go apologize to my customer, they will come with me. Yet, I basically have to contact a customer and arrange a meeting myself. In a way, I have freedom, but if something happens, I have to take responsibility. It's good and bad, right? Individuals or people in lower ranks take responsibility. It is nice (for the company) to have a person like me who is in a lower rank take responsibility.

This young engineer compares his organization with other Japanese companies and indicates how different his company is. He emphasizes that unlike other Japanese companies, his managers do not interfere with his work. His manager interferes only when he has to visit his customer to apologize for the mistakes he has made. He demonstrates strong responsibility and independence for a task he is handling, which is not received in his aforementioned companies. Substantial responsibility and authority allocations to young individuals hold true in Japan Semicon in comparison with other traditional or conservative Japanese companies, which normally tend to avoid risks and try to spread responsibility among a group of people, not only because they are cautious about not making

mistakes but also because they do not trust young novices. Consequently, the originality and ideology of the organization were reproduced by this member.

Similarly, a company's originality can be emphasized on the nation base. One thirty-one year old Japanese sales manager expresses how different and special Japan Semicon is in Japan as to its way of motivating employees to be responsible:

> *Jyapan Semikon tte sugoi kawatta kaisha de, nihon no kaisha dakara to yuuwake janakute, nihon no kokono kigyoo to yuuimi de shugoku tokushu de, shain ni yaruki o dasaseru tame ni fyookasu shiteiku. 'Anata no sekinin de are o shinasai', 'Kore o shinasai' to dondon yarasarechaundesu. Shain hitori hitori ga yaruki ya yaruki no aruhito ga dondon ookina shigoto o chanto dekimasu. Yariki ga nakereba soredake desu. Uchi no busho mo yaruki no aruhito ga ookute, sugoku iyoku ni moetete, mattaku wake ga wakarazu haitte kita hito demo, san-nen toka go-nen no aida ni monosugoku kanzen ni tantoo shite tsutaete ikanai to ikenai, to yuunowa arimasu.*
>
> Japan Semicon is very different. It is not because this is a Japanese company, but because it is very special even in Japan. It spends so much energy considering how employees can be motivated. 'Do that with your responsibility.' 'Do this.' Like such, we are asked to do many things. Every inspired employee can manage a big task. If you are not motivated, that's it. In my department [in Semicon US], there are so many people who are highly motivated and have a strong desire. Even if some people decided to work here without any prior knowledge, they would find themselves be in charge of a responsible job and be expected to pass on their job [to others] within three to five years.

The sales manager describes how Japan Semicon is different not because it is a Japanese company but because it even differs from a typical Japanese corporation. Through his account, he highlights a unique dimension of his company; age is not a main factor for taking on the responsibility of a project and young and new employees are regarded as reliable and competent if they are highly inspired to try their best. Learning from his manager, who allocated authority and responsibility to him when he was new and young,

he reproduces this practice and encourages his subordinates to take on a significant role at work.

Further, a company's distinctiveness is shown through personal attraction. A Japanese thirty-nine year old BU assistant manager indicates his reasons for being fond of Japan Semicon:

> *Jyapan Semikon ga suggoku sukinan desuyo. Boku wa nani ga sukikato yuuto, jiyuu to yuuka kengenijyo sareterushi, kengen mo motasete moratterushi, hito ga iidesu yone... Yoku dorama toka de dareka wakazoo tte yuu sinnmai ga okyakusan toko de konna koto kimechaimashita, tte yuujanaidesuka. Sooshitara dorama dato, ue no hito ga detekite, 'Bakamono!' toka '…shitekoi! toka yuuja naidesuka. Tada Jyapan Semikon wa soyuunjankute, tatoeba, shinnin a machigaetatte uchi ga furi ni narukoto toka, uchi no rieki ga heru yoona kotodemo icchatta. Soshitara, Jyapan Semikon wa doosuru kato yuuto, 'Tsugi kara kiwotsukero. Shaanaina. Konkai yattaro,' tte itte sono rieki o ikani sukunaku suru toka, okyaku-san niwa moo iikaeshikikanaito, yuuyoona kanji. Hito o sodatete iku ue de no chiimuwaaku no dojoo ga Jyapan Semikon niwa aruto omoundesu.*
>
> I like Japan Semicon so much. What I like is freedom, authority delegation, and people … Often times TV shows illustrate a scene like, a young salesman makes a poor deal with a customer, then his manager yells at him, shouting like 'This Moron!' or 'Go back and do…!' However, in Japan Semicon, such scenes are unlikely to be seen. If a new salesman accidentally promises something that goes against our company or that causes our company to lose profit, what Japan Semicon says is, 'Be careful next time. There is nothing you can do about it. It will do this time.' Japan Semicon thinks about how we can recover our profit loss because it knows that we cannot go back and tell a different thing to a customer anymore. I think Japan Semicon has fundamental elements for personal growth and teamwork.

This assistant manager expresses how much he likes the company, its practices, and people at work. Based on the company's principles of freedom, managers allow their subordinates room to make mistakes. As the president of the company encourages the employees, it is all right to make mistakes, yet it is important to correct them quickly.

Considering this practice, the assistant manager stresses that managers in Japan Semicon show understanding to their subordinates and collaborate with them to minimize risks of mistakes.

The manager also uses a contrasting technique to underline difference. Rather than bringing up other Japanese companies, he imagines his familiar TV shows and performs differences. His images of other Japanese companies are more traditional, authoritarian, and conservative, not allowing subordinates to make a mistake or show understanding. “This Moron!” and “Go back and do…!” are harsh punishment for employees. On the other hand, his personal attachment becomes more obvious when he performs the Japan Semicon manager’s response, “Be careful next time. There is nothing you can do about it. I will do this time,” though the English translation cannot fully grasp a close personal relationship between a manager and a subordinate as well as manager’s care-taking role. The English expressions may sound more like giving up on the subordinate and showing impossibility for letting him handle the job again. However, if you hear this in Japanese with a regional dialect, it conveys a different meaning. The assistant BU manager is from the Kansai area in Japan, where people use a distinct dialect and accent. During the interview, the manager used standard Japanese with a Kansai accent, but he used Kansai dialect when he told me this, “*Tsugi kara kiwotsukero yo* (Be careful next time). *Shaanaina* (There is nothing you can do about it). *Konnkai yattaro* (I will do this time).” “*Tsugi kara kiwotsukero yo* (Be careful next time)” is standard Japanese with a touch of masculinity; whereas “*Shaanaina* (There is nothing you can do about it). *Konnkai yattaro* (I will do this time)” involves the Kansai dialect and contains a nuance of closeness with his subordinate, kindness to take care of him, and releasing stress from him. Although “*Shaanaina* (There is nothing you can do about it)”

shows power that the addresser has over the addressee, it contains a comical way of forgiving what the addressee has done. On the other hand, "*Konkai yattaro* (I will do this time)" indicates that the manager would help only this time but no other times. While the manager is helping the subordinate, he is also providing him with another opportunity to try again and encouraging him to learn from this experience and take more responsibility next time. The manager, thus, performs a practice of the company, which is also his practice, and reproduces the ideology of the company and habitus of his conducts through his account.

Finally, a company's marginalization is also illustrated with unordinary as well as legendary personal experiences. Another Japanese BU assistant manager, who is thirty-nine years old, also expresses how much freedom the company has given to him:

> *Mae yatteru koto ni kyoomi ga nakunatta. De, atarashii koto o yaritai, to yuu tokorode jyoshi ga 'Jya Amerika ike' to yuukanji no kotodesune. Mae wa Kankoku no eigyo o tantoo shitemashita. Kankoku wa tenkin jya nakute ikeru kyori nannde, jissai niwa nenkan 40kaito, maishuu no yooni tonde itte mashita. Kankoku de urete kore ijyo iranaitte kurai uretakara tsumannai na, to. Nanka atarashii koto o, to ittara Amerika ni nattan desune.*
>
> I had no interest in what I was doing in a previous position. I told my manager that I wanted to try new things. Then he told me to go to America. I was in charge of sales in Korea before. Since Korea was close enough to fly, I actually flew there every week, forty times a year. Since I sold [machines] so many that were beyond necessary, I got bored. I wanted to do something new. Then I was asked to go to America.

His actual personal experience showed that the company provided him with an opportunity to try new things out when he lost interest in his job. He himself may not be like a Japanese. Likewise, his company is not like Japanese either. If he had carried, what

to be called, a Japanese typical characteristic, he would have been patient until he was assigned to a new position. If Japan Semicon had been a normal Japanese company, it would not have listened to a personal reason so quickly. In this sense, they are exceedingly different from Japanese standard. This is a reproduction of Japan Semicon's ideal characteristics, challenging spirit.

The manager also continues, "I don't know how other people look at Japan Semicon's culture. But the company often says, 'Think that YOU are the President of Japan Semicon. Work as if YOU were managing the company rather than considering vertical concerns.' I began working for this company in such a culture." This is an attempt to reproduce the Japan Semicon legendary figures and their entrepreneurial spirit. The manager furthermore explains why he has not left Japan Semicon:

> *Kesshite kurikaeshi jyanai shigoto desukara omoshiroi kamo shirenai desune. Mainichi onajiyooni yarukotoga kimattetara babun watashi wa kono kaisha ni inaikamo shirenai desune, seikaku-teki niwa. Sooyuu men dewa nanika atarashii kotoarushi, daremo yattakotoga naikotoga tsune ni hairukara, charenji wo shitsuzukerareru kana, to. Sono kawari kiai to konjyo ga irimasuyone. Mentaritee no sekai desuyo ne, rikutsu yorimo. Kekkyoku mentaritee ga nai hito tte yuunowa nani yattemo damedesuyo. Sooyuu imi dewa ii kaisha to omoimasuyo. Dokono kuni demo. Amerika ni towazu, Kankoku demo Taiwan demo soodashi. Iroiro kanoosei o midashiatteru.*
>
> My job is never repetitive, that's probably why it is interesting. Thinking about my personal characteristics, if I have a job that is the same everyday, I may not be in this company. In this sense, I always engage in something new or something that no one has done before. So, I can stay challenged. In turn, I need fortitude and determination. This place is where we work with mentality not with theory. After all, I think mental strength generates a new idea. People who don't carry such mentality are no good with whatever they do. In that sense, I think this company does well in other countries, not only in America, but also Korea and Taiwan. It brings about all kinds of possibilities.

Even though his job is never repetitive, his perspective - keep challenging new things in the company, is habitualized, which is the reason he has not left the company for seventeen years. Another perspective in his business world is the necessity of possessing fortitude and determination because such attitudes and mental strengths, not theory, eventually bring about creativity and new ideas. The importance of creativity is exactly what Japan Semicon asks for from its employees. The manager, who also has experience working in Korea and Taiwan, maintains that the Japan Semicon Group, including its subsidiaries in other countries, provides a challenging atmosphere in which employees as well as the companies seek their own potentials and make use of them. This also highlights an ability to survive in other countries and in the world with its particularity.

The above four employees' accounts demonstrate their sense of Japan Semicon's distinctiveness from typical Japanese companies. By presenting contrasts and repeating the practice, the employees habitualize the difference between Japan Semicon and others. They not only reproduce the ideology by inheriting the practice from their managers but also co-produce the reality collectively, which reinforces the particularities of their company in a global world. The company's marginalization are born related to other companies. Moreover, Japan Semicon's practice is repeated through the fact that capable employees receive managerial positions at a young age, such as thirty-one for a sales manager and thirty-nine for BU assistant managers. To prove this practice more strongly, when the current president was inaugurated, he was only forty-six years old; which is barely seen in Japan considering the large scale of Japan Semicon business. Accordingly, the Japan Semicon's particularities and practices are repeatedly actualized, addressed, and seen in connection with others.

This is a good aspect of globalization, which allows different corporations to maintain their originalities relatively with others. However, a counter argument of globalization is its external force of integrating or homogenizing a culture (Papastergiadis, 2000).

4.4. GLOBALIZATION AND THE LOSS OF ORIGINALITY

Globalization in business underlies a company's expansion to the world, internationalization of economic and marketing activity and capital movement. When business expands, so does its risk. Corporations can no longer perform based on a smaller scale of rules and procedures but they need to create clear guidelines that employees in the groups can follow. Those restrictions and controls, however, sometimes wind up losing the company's marginalities, as many people's fear losing authenticity and culture (Clifford, 1988).

As stated earlier, Japan Semicon's forty-year tradition of top priority, customer satisfaction, was replaced with safety first by external pressure. In the same way, the other distinctive areas have been lost. As Japan Semicon grows globally, it has been transforming from innovative and unique to normal company. Some employees have begun observing this transformation. One young Japanese engineer describes a subsidiary in Japan:

> *Jyapan Semikon Nanbu mo moo sorosoro, mukashi bokuga ita kaisha mitai ni natte ikunodewa naikato omoimasu ne. Ossan bakkari fuete, amari wakai hito ga baribari yatteru yoona tokoro kara chotto kawatte ikukamo shirenai desune. Mukashi no hoo ga yappari yokatta desune. Maa, ima wa kachi kachi tto shigoto shite ikimashoo to yuu fuu ni natterun desuyone. Mae wa toriaezu okyaku-san ni dashite ii no o tsukureba iinda, to yuu kanji de, ima wa ookii kaisha ni natte kitan de, kiritsu datoka kisoku datoka shigoto ni taishite no hoo mo kachitto kimerarete kuru wake desuyone. Soo suru to, kaku paato bubun ni sorenari no riidaa dattari toka*

> *shokusei ga tsuitari shite, nakanaka tantoo to site wa ugoki nikui yoona sosiki ni natte ikudeshoone. Sorewa yappari chiisai chuushookigyoo no yoona tokoroga yaritai koto wa yaru. Ookiku naru to shooganai koto desune.*
>
> I think Japan Semicon *Nanbu* [one of Japan Semicon's manufacturing subsidiary] will sooner or later become a company where I used to work before. The number of *ossan* [a derogatory term indicating middle-aged men] will increase and the current situation in which young people work hard and energetically will be lost, I think. The old times were good. Now, there is an atmosphere that we should work within a fixed box. It used to be like we were just concentrating on making good products for customers. But now the company has been getting bigger, so that rules and regulations have been created for our jobs. Then, a role of leader or other job regulations are determined in each part and it will be difficult for a person in charge to do whatever he wants. It won't be like a middle-sized company where people can do whatever they want. Yet, there is nothing we can do about it when the company becomes big.

The engineer expresses how liberally he was able to work before at Japan Semicon compared to other companies. As the company expands, however, he finds that rules and regulations restrict free thoughts, creativity, and initiative, which the company has been promising to provide to the employees. Although it is necessary to have rules and restrictions as a part of globalization, organizational members' freedom, energy, and effects are lessened.

A Japanese manager who has been working for Japan Semicon for nineteen years also perceives a rather negative change in Japan Semicon due to its development:

> *Mukashi wa 'Shinkansen' to yabareteta keredomo, nakunatta wake jyanaikedo, motto motto futsuu no kaisha ni natte kiteiru. Dondon ookiku nattete hatten shitete sugoi to omotterun dakeredomo, demo ippoo de dongatta bubun ga nakunatte kiteru na, to yuuki ga shimasu. Sooyuu kyokutan na bubun ga. Mukashi no Jyapan Semikon wo seikoo saseta nowa sono kyokutan na bubun datta to omoun desukedo. Ima mo kanzen ni futsuu no kaisha ni nattato wa omotte naikedo, demo tabun futsuu no*

> *kaisha ni natte kiteru na, to yuunowa arushi, mochiron konokurai ookikunattara sisutemu o chanto seiri shite to yuunowa hitsuyoo nandesukedo, demo sono katenoko soijya ikenai na, to yuunowa ippoo dewa arukara, sono hen no kaitori ga muzukashii to omoimasu ne.*
>
> Japan Semicon used to have a nickname, 'Bullet Train.' The nickname has not completely disappeared yet, but Japan Semicon is becoming a normal company more and more. I think it's very impressive to see the growth of the company; on the other hand, I feel that it has been losing a radical or extreme part. I believe that such an extraordinary thinking or action brought success to Japan Semicon long ago. I don't think it has completely become an ordinary company, but it is becoming a common company. Although it is necessary for the company to organize systems as it expands, it is not good to lose the foundation. I think it's difficult to decide what to give up and what to consume.

The nickname "Bullet Train" indicates speed, recklessness, and strong determination that cannot stop running to a targeted destination. It also illustrates endless energy that does not give up, withdraw, and avoid challenges. As the use of this nickname vanishes, practices that referred to the nickname are disappearing. The practices were the success of Japan Semicon that related to its difference, uniqueness, radical thinking, and extraordinary way of handling business. Such distinctiveness or individuality, however, has decreased as the company grows and establishes rigid systems and organizations. This might be a dilemma that revolutionary organizations experience with their globalization of business. While it is required to construct more organized, systematized, and consistent operations of business, it might neglect marginalized characteristics that made the company big, successful, and renowned around the world.

In response to my question about which area Japan Semicon had to change most in the future, one Japanese sales manager insisted on speed that the company used to have:

Yappari hayasa, supiido. Kaisha ga ookiku natterun de hito mo nibai kurai ni natterushi, okyaku mo fueteru kara shooganai desukedo, henka ni taishite no supiido to kookishin mitai na mono. Kooarubeki, toka shibarareteru kanji ga surundesuyone. Mukashi wa soodemo nakattande. Ima wa risuku ga ookiikara minna bibitteru towa iwanai kedo, omoikitte ude nobashite booru nagetenai, to yuu kanji ga shimasu. Jyapan Semikon no iitokoro wa, 'Shippai shite mo ii,' to. Dakara wakai hito ni hijyoo ni ookina shigoto o makasete, 'Shippai shitemo ue no hito ga atoshimatsu shite ageru kara tonikaku yarukoto wa yarinasai,' to yuunokga Jyapan Semikon no ii bunka dato boku wa omottete, sorega dondon nakunatte kitekuru nowa yokunai na, to… Maneejimento no hitotachi ga atarashii no o shooka surutte toki ni kangaeteru jikan ga nagai tokane. 'Yattemite sokokara kangaereba iijan,' toka omou fuu ni natte hoshii to yuuka.

> Definitely speed [that we need to improve]. Since the company has been growing so big, the number of employees has doubled, and the number of customers has increased, there is not much we can do about it. But it's lack of speed and curiosity toward change. I feel that the employees are restricted within the fixed image of what should be done. It wasn't like that before. It is like everyone is apprehensive now because the risk is big. It's like no one has thrown a ball with his arm fully stretched out. A good aspect of Japan Semicon is, 'It is ok to fail. Let young people handle a big job. Do your best. When you fail, your manager will take care of it.' I think this is a good culture, but it is no good that the company is losing such culture… When managers try to figure new things out, they take so long to think. I want them to be like, 'Try first, then think.'

This account involves two kinds of practices; before and now. He explained a good aspect of the culture; 'It is ok to fail. Let young people handle a big job. Do your best. When you fail, your manager will take care of it,' which is a habitualized practice that sustained marginalizations of the company. On the other hand, a current and emerging practice that he observes is "no one has thrown a ball with his arm fully stretched out." This analogy or perspective demonstrates anxiety, restraint, and intimidation. As the size of the company expands, a risk factor augments and people become more careful and cautious about taking a risk or trying new things; therefore, they restrict behaviors or actions because they try

not to make mistakes that might damage the company. This manager views this consequence as a loss of culture since carefree and challenging attitudes and encouragement from managers are already in retrospect in Japan Semicon.

These three accounts highlight the loss of culture and practices while implying emergent practices; though, they are not distinctive from others. Japan Semicon's business expansion has clearly created obstacles to the retention of its original culture.

4.5. GLOBALIZATION AS A PRACTICE

When multinational organizations just begin becoming global and communicate their intention explicitly and repeatedly, they will instill a set of values that form the habitus and affect communication at work. In other words, globalization is no longer used to indicate a process, but it sets a value in the company. Globalization is an exciting process; however, it is also a buzzword. It is overused by many people without clear meanings, pictures, and approaches. People have different views and understanding of what a global company is like or what globalization really is. When companies introduce a new idea and a goal of globalizing their organizations, employees might suffer from uncertainty and ambiguity. Globalization can become a shared expression in globalizing companies, yet it may take a while for them to establish a coherent and shared scheme among their employees. During this stage, a parent company might deal with conflicting views and criticism from various people and cultures.

When companies introduce a goal of globalizing companies due to their survival and more success, their members will show their interest, cooperation,

and responsibility to be involved in such organizations. While the concept of globalization is still complex and vague, employees might incorporate it in their activities and turn into practice. For example, in Semicon US, a new job named ‘globalization manager’ was created. In an annual meeting of one BU department at Semicon US, employees held a group discussion entitled ‘What is True-Globalization?’ and considered strategies to achieve the goal.

Difficulties that multinational companies might have to handle, nonetheless, are different meanings of globalization among employees. The meaning might vary depending on employees’ role, responsibility, perspective, and concern. For a Japanese fifty-four year old financial manager, globalization means to overcome language and cultural barriers and understand business in the world. He wants to be a businessman who can freely utilize Japanese and English. On the other hand, a thirty-one year old sales manager considers globalization to mean providing world-class products and support, for product distinctions are becoming less and less in semiconductor industries. True globalization, accordingly, involves understanding needs that the world wants and manufacturing universal products that can be used anywhere in the world. Some groups claimed that it would be important to become a company in which customers never care about Japan Semicon, Semicon US, or other subsidiaries, meaning that the same quality of service and products should be provided regardless of the name or location of the Japan Semicon Group. Standardized documents, forms, rules, and procedures should also be established. In this respect, all employees need to understand each other’s culture and procedure,

respect the differences, and communicate regardless of language, region, and culture. Some people even perceived that the name of the world headquarters 'Japan Semicon' hinders the company's globalization because it gives too much impression that the company is Japanese. Therefore, they suggested changing the name of the headquarters to something like 'World Semicon.'

Although individuals' and groups' perspectives toward globalization may vary, a common assertion might be identified in another buzzword, incorporating both globalization and localization, which is a prerequisite for globalizing a company (Marquardt, 1999). If companies are in the middle of preparing this stage or their understandings do not match with employees', they will encounter harsher criticism. One Japanese employee believes that globalization will be achieved when the company is able to distinguish places in which it should integrate and create world homogeny from places which it should leave as they are, according to cultural and local rules. However, he does not believe that the top management of Japan Semicon has been able to identify the differences yet. It is still looking for as many places as possible that it can turn into the same globalized styles, he maintains. Another Japanese manager also believes that the company will fail if it cannot identify which parts to localize as opposed to which parts to globalize. A true meaning of globalization involves a well-balanced way in which a corporation communicates global philosophy like religion and approaches different regions with local rules. It is impossible to ask everyone in the world to handle the job the same way. The manager claims that Japan Semicon is still a top-heavy and unbalanced organization in which the majority is

occupied with globalization while localization is hardly considered. He is also critical of the top management's action: "*Kikeba kanarazu kireina kotoba ga kaette kimasu. Dare ga itsu doo yarundesuka to kikuto, nakanaka kaette kimasen ne. Gutaiteki na koto ga mada miete naindesu.* (If someone asks [people in the top management about globalization], they will answer using beautiful words and phrases. However, if she asks for details, they cannot answer with concrete words, including where, when, what, and who. They have not been able to see concrete actions yet.)"

In contrast, the other Japanese sales manager is satisfied to see that the first phase of globalization, advancement of foreign sales, was quite successful because he reached the goal that was set at that time by elevating the local sales fifty to sixty times. However, he perceives many places that should change. He states that although Japan Semicon might have been thinking that it passed its culture on to other subsidiaries successfully, there are still many places that need improvement. The good aspects of the culture have been transmitted, yet so have the negative aspects that are still conventional compared to other American organizations. He believes that it is important to bring in 'new blood' or 'different sweat' to the negative sides of Japan Semicon, especially in relation to operations or personnel. These examples illustrate difficulty of actualizing and internalizing the practice of globalization compared to spreading a broad idea and necessity of globalization.

As companies go international and establish their subsidiaries, they are required to handle local employees' understanding, feeling, concern, and power

about the way of globalizing their organizations in order to pursue global harmony. It is a quite arduous task, however. One American marketing manager in Semicon US perceives a lack of awareness of globalization in Japan Semicon. He maintains that there is a comparatively small group in Japan Semicon that really understands what is required for a global organization and that really understands what is required to provide service, react to US customers, understand what US customers want, and trust the judgment of certain people in Semicon US. Although he does not use the word localization, he shows some frustration with a lack of power that the local employees have:

> Everything important has to go to Japan and it takes too much time. A global organization will empower the US guy to have some influence on efficient and strategic reasons to sell products. I think this always will be the case. Strategy will be set in Japan. So, what I would like to see is a global meaning that will be some strong commitment and influence based on the US customers.

This shows that more power rests in the home company. People who have power can control the decision making process and gain the outcomes they want (Hardy, 1985). In the process of deciding whether or not the American manager should work for Semicon US, he talked to a vice president of the business unit in Japan over the phone. He revealed his honest feeling to him saying, “Well, I am a little concerned being American in a Japanese company. I won’t have a dependable level of respect and influence.” Then the vice president said, “Look, we are trying to get a global company. We are interested in getting the right people to be a global company. It will not be perfect, but as time goes on, I think you will see we are different.” The vice president of the business at that time is currently assigned as one of the executive members in Semicon US. Not only has he tried to

communicate the current status and expectations of Japan Semicon with American employees through meetings, but also he has been trying very hard to understand what local employees want and need to accomplish their goals and feel satisfied with their work. Furthermore, a Japanese marketing manager keenly observes the current Semicon US situation and states that Japan Semicon started promoting globalization before it fully understood American culture. Although globalization should have ideally progressed along with localization, it had begun without an understanding of each other's culture by both Japanese and American employees.

With regard to the parent company's control over subsidiaries, some American employees show frustration and sometimes anger. One American field service supervisor sees Japan Semicon Group as global in terms of many offices in international bases. However, he sees limited power that the subsidiaries have. For instance, when a customer wants to purchase some service or training options along with systems, the subsidiary is not allowed to negotiate the price; only Japan Semicon is. A considerable amount of work and decision-making has to be made by a factory in Japan. When a customer says, "I need this application," the manager has to apologize for not being able to answer quickly. He wishes to have more control and be able to get information back to the customer in a prompt manner. He continues saying, "There are Japanese guys in the office who are decision-makers. We have to go through them with everything," and indicates that Japanese expatriates have more power than locally hired employees. However, he also considers this situation as positive and negative. The positive side is that the Japanese can monitor what is happening between Semicon US and customer.

However, the negative side is that the Japanese have an overload of work. The supervisor says, “I think it’s unfair to them (the Japanese assignees) because they have a lot work to do. I am not the only one calling the factory saying, ‘Look, I need the answer today.’ They don’t want to really yell at the factory. The guys over there (Japan) are saying, ‘What’s going on? What’s your problem?’”

The other American purchasing manager shows her anger toward the parent company. She thinks that Japan Semicon is definitely a Japanese company and not a global company. She describes Japan Semicon using strong words, “They (Japanese) are very controlling. They don’t trust Americans. I think that maybe they didn’t consider enough before they decided to extend globalization to the US.” This view is similar with the one that the Japanese marketing manager saw in Japan Semicon’s unprepared expansion. She also calls Japanese assignees *spies*:

> There are Japanese people located in foreign offices to make sure the things are done to protect the Japanese picture. To me they are a kind of spy. I don’t think it’s completely negative because they helped us with our communication with Japan. It’s positive also. They are spies in the sense that they report back to Japan.

She sees that Japan Semicon is very controlling over how the business should be handled in subsidiaries. In her view, Japanese assignees are watchdogs, gatekeepers, or spies who monitor what Americans do and report it to the world headquarters in Japan. While she appreciates help from the Japanese communicating between the parent company and subsidiary, she does not believe

that they trust Americans enough to handle the jobs by themselves. A lack of freedom and independence is being situated on the employee's level.[17]

The above criticisms demonstrate how local employees might react differently depending on their economical power, which can be encapsulated by a Japanese employee' account as follows:

> *Nihon to Amerika to Yooroppa to yuuno wa, aru imi de niterun desuyo. Sorewa doremo inishiachibu o torooto yuu, aru isshu no pawaa poritikkusu mitai noga aruwake desune. Tokoro ga soreni taishite, Kankoku, Taiwan to yuunowa dochirakato yuuto, Nihon no yuutori ni tuizui simashoo, to. Tokuni Kankoku wa sooyuu ishi ga tsuyoi to omoun desukedomo. Sooyuu imi dewa, Nihon to Amerika to Yooroppa to yuunowa arushu no Jyapan Semikon Guruupu no naka dewa senshinchitai wo keisei shiteite, sono nakademo Amerika, Yooroppa ga hitotsu no araiansu o tsukutte ite, Nihon ni taishite happa o kakeru. Sarani, Amerika ga yappari ichiban opinionisuto de, katsu, yahari, okyaku-san no uriage mo ooi shi, okyaku-san no kazu mo ooishi, sono okyaku-san no motteru pawaa to yuunomo ookii wake desukara.*
>
> Japan, American, and Europe are similar in a sense that they all want to possess the initiative. It is kind of power politics. Compared to them, Korea and Taiwan rather follow whatever Japan says… In this sense, Japan, America, and Europe are prominent in the Japan Semicon Group. America and Europe, especially, create an alliance together and challenge Japan. After all, America wins not only because it is an opinionist, but also

[17] However, this issue involves a complex power relationship. When I asked the manager to compare her position with the one at her previous company, a well-known American semiconductor, she expresses how tightly her previous company was structured and how little was left for individuals to make decisions. In terms of changing policies and procedures, terminating someone, and choosing a different computer system, there was no one who had power to make such decisions at her previous company; whereas Semicon US has a small number of people who can exert such power. Her different attitudes are shown between the American company and Japanese subsidiary. She could give up her power in the American company, but not in the Japanese subsidiary. Since she started to work for Semicon US from a fairly early stage of its development in 1996, she might have seen a number of ways to improve business that she could influence. Yet, she was not allowed to make decisions "because my manager was Japanese (from Japan Semicon)." The American manager's experience in Semicon US is intricately constructed based on her judgment on maturity of the company, its national origin, a nationality of her manager, and a different expectation in her position. This idea of cultural interference will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

because it makes the largest profit and has many customers who also have power.

Then, the practice of globalization becomes more complicated involving different perceptions and views by employees in different countries who are aware of their national economical power. This can be explained by Habaab (1988), who incorporated political power in international negotiation. He introduces two kinds of structural power. One is aggregate structural power, referring to a negotiator's resources, capabilities, and widely accepted positions, which are defined by the external world. In other words, this power is related to the negotiator's total resources and possessions. The total national resources depend on its democratic, economic, and military force. Japan Semicon might consider the United States as great power, Britain as medium, and Korea as small. The other kind of structural power is issue-specific structural power, which is concerned with a negotiator's potential capabilities and positions compared to another negotiator concerning a specific issue. Interdependence or mutual dependence toward each other for achieving a preferred outcome is a requisite condition in negotiation since each outcome depends on another party. Furthermore, to operate the issue-specific power, negotiators are required to exercise behavioral power; their behaviors or the process in which they use or control their resources to gain their desired outcomes, which are revealed through tactics, such as coalition building that Semicon US and Semicon Europe established to negotiate with Japan Semicon. In the Japan Semicon Group, Semicon US has the most economic and behavioral power, both because the US is economically stronger than any of the other countries, and because English is the official language. At the same time, Japan

Semicon retains a legitimate amount of power due to its parental role over Semicon US; this power, however, might be underestimated by the US employees because Japan's economy is weaker than the US economy, and the Japanese language is less influential than English.

A parent company of globalizing organization, thus, have power to gain employees' collaborative activities and practices; however, it might struggle to reach the goal, especially when international and political power issues are involved.

4.6. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

This chapter explored the relationality among organizations, the external world, and employees, and power relationships between the parent company and other national economic powers. The process of globalization strongly influences multinational organizations, as well as their shared values, practices, and goals. The parent company of multinational corporations has the power to modify traditions and create more relevant practices which can advance the corporation's globalization. Some companies might find it difficult to abandon a sense of individuality as they globalize; however, globalization can be described as integrating both globalization and localization, incorporating the best of relevant cultures, and eliminating the negative areas. Yet, discovering where to globalize and where to localize, and which are the good or bad aspects of different cultures, is often difficult, especially because such evaluations might involve intricate power relationships. Whenever multinational companies try to be global and instill this idea, the parent companies have power to turn the process of

globalization towards a set of values that their employees should believe in. While the employees are flexible in terms of embracing this perspective and working toward a predetermined goal, as responsible members of the group they also have the power to question, raise opinions, and challenge the path that the parent company is taking. Employee frustration appears in situations where unequal power relationships are involved. In the Japan Semicon Group, the US exerts more power than any other country. The macro analysis of influence and power as a whole is hardly considered in intercultural communication studies, although it seems to highly affect interactants' intercultural experiences and cultural perceptions.

This chapter demonstrated the global ideology of Japan Semicon and the importance of the notion of globalization recognized in the Japan Semicon Group. The analysis of the relationality between the globalization process and Japan Semicon, and the power relationship between the parent company and the subsidiary will enhance understanding of the next level of analysis (local field – Semicon US), where employees of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds engage in everyday activities and communication.

Chapter 5: Local Field

Japan Semicon established its US headquarters, Semicon US, in 1994 in order to promote the globalization of the company. To fulfill a mission as well as follow the parent company's wishes, Semicon US needed to enhance both globalization and localization by incorporating the best of two cultures. One of my objectives in this research is to understand a bicultural environment of Semicon US where Japanese and American employees communicate, work together, and make sense of their intercultural experiences. It is always challenge for both Japanese and American employees to learn why people do things in certain ways. Most of the studies on intercultural communication tend to neglect individual learning and comprehension regarding the new world, away from their original cultures, in which they live and work. It is critical to understand the shared ideology that Japanese and American employees have in order to work together successfully. This chapter explores the shared local field which is likely to influence perceptions and communication between Japanese and American employees. I will begin by reviewing two studies that are closely connected to my perspective.

When two organizations from distinct national cultures join together, a "negotiated" culture emerges (Brannen, 1994). In case of a Japanese owned company in the US, Brannen refers to a bicultural organization as neither Japanese or American nor even Japanese American but a negotiated reality different from both Japanese and American. Brannan uses the verb "negotiate"

meaning “organizational phenomena as individual organizational actors both enacting and actively creating the culture of their organization” (p. 86). This way, she encourages us to take account of individual experiences, backgrounds, and personalities in the analysis of cultural conflict.

From a broader point of view, Bird, Taylor, and Beechler (1999) identified four kinds of organizational learning models among Japanese overseas affiliates in East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast of the United States, Mexico, Southeast Asia, and Europe, using surveys and semi-structured, open-ended interviews based on their five year research. In companies which use the *Exportive Model,* a way of doing things in Japan is literally transported to new sites. The companies tend to believe in the universal applicability of Japanese management; therefore, the minimization of modifying the Japanese way is emphasized. The *Exportive Model* was mainly found in affiliates, such as Singapore and Thailand, where the countries are similar to Japan in terms of legal and sociocultural perspectives. Since the major adjustments from the parent template are not necessary, learning from both the affiliates and the parent company limited the ability to confirm the original assumption.

The second model is labeled the Closed Hybrid where the affiliates rely on a parent company’s management template. If affiliates realize early on that the parent company’s way does not work in a local environment, they adjust it by attributing the cause of the problems and unsuitability to external influences, such as local workers who are poorly trained or local competitors who might be offering higher wages. Because of the strong belief in the Japanese management

competency and externally directed causes of problems, the parent company and affiliates conclude that adjustments for the local environment are not applicable to other affiliates. Under such circumstances, the parent company tries to learn what is needed in the local situation and modify the original approach, but learning in other sources, such as the larger organization, is very limited.

The *Adoptive Model* refers to affiliates which perceive a great difference from Japan and attempt to adapt to the local environment as much as possible disregarding the superiority of the Japanese parent company's approach. Basically, firms believe that the parent company's policies should not be imposed on foreign affiliates. When the firms encounter problems, they try to seek causes internally by identifying flaws in their actions or approach. Such firms actively learn their local environments, local employees, and locally customize approaches; however, they are unwilling to share their practices or learning with other affiliates.

The last learning type is termed the *Open Hybrid Model*, which is an approach as that may or may not have started based on a parent company's perspective. When the firms face problems, they tend to look for a duality of parent and local perspectives. For example, the first managing director in one electronic sales company in the United Kingdom tried to incorporate the parent's strong corporate culture and the British work ethic. Since the firm had suffered from bad morale and low productivity for a year, the director discarded almost the entire system, addressed change both internally and externally, and developed a new system which facilitates socializing employees into corporate and Japanese

ways of doing and thinking and modifying several policies, such as compensation and work assignments, to adapt to the norms among British competitors. This type of firm is always open to change the preexisting policies by adjusting the parent company's approach to a local situation. When the firms recognize their success, they tend to disseminate what they learn widely within the company.

The above two theories illustrate two levels of cultural negotiation in Japanese multinational companies; individual and organizational levels. Individual and organizational cultural negotiations and learning are unavoidable to produce and reproduce a bicultural workplace. Although the term biculturalism suggests that two cultures are equally dispersed, in reality it is more complicated and disordered. These studies of management parallel the variety of patterns in society when cultures blend through immigration and national shifts.

5.1. CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON PRACTICES

Four cultural perspectives of practices are logically possible in multinational companies when two distinct cultures come into together in an organization. The first perspective is a mono-cultural practice in which one of the local cultures dominates. In the case of Semicon US, this would be American-dominant practice or Japanese-dominant practice. The second perspective is a bicultural practice which emphasizes the two different cultural backgrounds. Power would be fairly equally dispersed to both cultures, but they do not intermingle with each other, leaning the original cultures intact. The company might do some things "Japanese" and some things "American." Or some parts of the company might be "American" and other parts "Japanese." The third

perspective is a negotiated cultural practice. The two cultures would be continuously reflected and blended together. The practices would be identified not totally with either one of the two, but with a combination and integration resulting in new practices. The fourth perspective is a shared cultural practice. The shared cultural practice is the one that organizations and individuals coincidentally have already shared similar practices before contacting each other, so little adjustment is necessary. These four perspectives sometimes overlap one another. They have been reported as generalizations for companies located in the US. In fieldwork at Semicon US, a more complex picture emerged, perhaps because my method included both macro- and micro- analysis. I delineate the four perspectives and combinations of the perspectives supported by the organizational and individual cultural practices.

5.2. MONO-CULTURAL PRACTICES

Mono-cultural practices focus heavily on one culture because they are more appropriate, available, and legitimate than the other culture. Much of what goes on at Semicon US is American-dominant cultural practice since it is located in the US. So, it becomes interesting when Japanese cultural practices appear. They are a site of power and philosophical meaning. That is, the difference – the 'otherness' – is given meaning by virtue of its difference. "They do <u>that</u> because they want to."

5.2.1. American-Dominant Cultural Practices

Office Space. American-dominant cultural practices are found in most physical settings and company events. Physical layouts are structured similar to normal American

companies. In each department, cubical desks are separated by partition. Managers possess separate private rooms with windows. In Japan, on the other hand, employees sit closely in a long table or they have individual desks, which are two to three times smaller than the ones in the US, without being separated by partition. Only executive members and high-ranking managers have separate private rooms in Japan. Since Semicon US has abundant resources of land, it can offer large space. More practically, however, it is a local and common practice in the US. The spatial layout is American.

Japanese and American employees express the opinion about the office space and desk differently. Many American employees complain that they have no privacy, as also mentioned in Sumihara's study (1992) and their physical space is too tight. On the other hand, Japanese assignees feel thankful to obtain their desks, which are twice to three times bigger than the ones in Japan, and their own telephones, which they would have to share with others in Japan. This contrast originates from different habitualizations of office space. There is a plenty of lands in Springfield, where Semicon US is located, unlike New York City. Therefore, many American employees might have already habitualized working with big desks in a wider space or in their own office valuing privacy in their previous companies. On the other hand, Japanese employees were used to working with others in a tighter area without any partitions and privacy; therefore, they feel more appreciative. In turn, they find it difficult to adjust their Americanized sense of using space back in Japan. Every time they go back to Japan, they feel happy that they are working in the US and feel sorry for employees in Japan. Such Japanese employees' experiences illustrate the

beginning, the end, and flexibility of habitualization; adapting to a new environment, going back to the old habit, and getting used to it again. Moreover, some American employees who have visited a Japanese office do not complain their notorious 'tighter' space in Semicon US, for they know how things are spaced out in Japan. They feel that they should be happy with what they have. Namely, they consider the spatial layouts based on the Japanese perception by learning the way a Japanese office is.

Halloween. Semicon US also offers company-wide events which predominantly follow American practices, such as a company picnic, a holiday party, Thanksgiving dinner, to name a few. Among those, the most fun, original event is Halloween, which involves individual, especially Japanese, cultural negotiation. Halloween is most exciting and passionate, yet it is also the least efficient and productive day for the company (see Appendix for Halloween pictures). Each department decides on a theme, - Wizard of OZ, a western bar, Las Vegas, heaven and earth, or a haunted house, for example - decorates the office, and chooses costumes according to the theme. Although employees begin planning several weeks prior to Halloween, no one tells what the theme is to other departments. It has to be secret and competitive. A day before Halloween, employees start decorating their offices after 5pm. Some offices even lock the door so that nobody from the other departments can peek inside. Some employees stay until 10:00 or 11:00pm to complete the decoration, eating delivered pizza for dinner. On the day of Halloween, Semicon US turns into a theme park, like an

Epcot Center. Some people start painting their faces or bodies at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. Some people come to work in their costumes.

On every Halloween, a costume contest is held in the front lobby at 10am. The judges are two vice presidents and one BU general manager. They turn into olden time judges wearing black gowns and long white powered wigs. Employees make a circle around the stage, and each employee in costume walks in front of the judges and performs his or her character. After the costume contest, the judges visit each department and score each office based on its creativity, uniqueness, and diligence. When the employees visit other departments, they explain to one another about their costumes and decorations and exchange opinions about other departments. This is the day when employees can barely get their work done because of continuous visitors and events. After lunch, employees start to take their costumes or face/body painting off since it is very uncomfortable and difficult to sit down in their chairs. Yet, some tolerant employees still keep their costumes on and try to work, even attending meetings.

This Halloween ritual in Semicon US can be identified as an overt attempt to introducing American culture to Japanese, for Halloween is more kids' event and it is rare for corporations, especially a semiconductor service sector where customers come and go, to practice this during work hours. This might be considered as an American hospitality by providing Japanese employees with an opportunity that they cannot experience in Japan. However, to participate in this Halloween event, Japanese expatriates in particular have to struggle with this unfamiliar American culture. While Halloween is a unique and fun event in the

US, it seems very peculiar to Japanese employees. Americans or people who were raised in the US might be used to dressing up for this and to spending money and time on making or renting costumes. For the Japanese employees, it is difficult to understand such energy and money spent for this ritual. It is also difficult to understand people's boldness in wearing crazy costumes and their willingness to become someone or something else. One Japanese employee, who is fifty-four years old, commented:

> *Harowiin no gyouji o mitemo wakaru yooni karera wa zenzen hejiteito simasen yone. Aayuu seishin tte nihonjin wa naknaka dekinai to omoimasu kedo, aayuu toki wa minna to issho ni kuzuretemo iinjya naikana, to yuuki wa shimasu ne. Watashi wa yappari hazukashikute dekinain desuyo. Ano hajirai o chooetsu shita ano tanoshisa, hogarakasa ii desuyone. Watasi wa dekinai desuyo, zannen nagara.*
>
> As you can see from the Halloween event, they [Americans] don't hesitate at all. Although I don't think it is very difficult for Japanese to be like that, I feel that it is good for Americans to be silly with everyone in such an occasion. I, after all, cannot do it because I feel embarrassed. Yet, it's good to see that kind of joyfulness and cheerfulness that are beyond embarrassment. I regret that I cannot do it.

He enjoys watching the employees acting excited and wildly during the event, but he cannot be a part of it because he feels embarrassed. At the age of fifty-four, it is probably very difficult for him to change his habit. Although most Americans might not feel embarrassed by their costumes, it does not mean that all employees participate in the event. Some are passionate about it every year while others do not care. Some fully participate in it in a certain year and then they do not take part in it at all the next year; it varies. However, a lack of Japanese participation becomes obvious since only a few of the small number of the Japanese population participate. One American manager views this tendency as a lack of feeling of

belonging to Semicon US on the part of Japanese employees. Due to a Japanese executive member's order, feeling of belonging to Semicon US, or enculturation of Japanese employees, however, the number of Japanese participants increases little by little every year. One Japanese administrative assistant, who commented in 2000, "*Nani mo shinai desuyo. Amerikajin wa kooyuu no sukidakara. Demo nihonjin wa nee.* (I am not going to wear a costume. Americans like this type of celebration, but not Japanese)," participated in Halloween in 2001 with other Japanese administrative assistants. In one BU, while only two Japanese managers participated in 2000, more Japanese managers, even those who are in their forties, joined in 2001 by painting their faces blue. One Japanese manager stated, "*Yappari sanka shinai to doredake omoshiroi ka wakaranai.* (It's very hard to see how fun it is until you participate in it.)" The young Japanese assignee, who was probably the first person who voluntarily participated in Halloween, said that he identified himself as a member of Semicon US instead of Japan Semicon even though Japan Semicon is where he is from and where he is going back eventually.

Who participates in the Halloween event can be determined in a number of different ways. First, participation is obligatory for some employees. All members of the HR department, including Japanese employees, are obligated to attend because HR sponsors the event. Two vice presidents and one manager play significant roles by judging the contest; therefore, they need to comply with the event coordinators. Second, as the HR manager says, employees who do not associate themselves with Semicon US members may not want to participate. They just come to work and do not care about company events. They might think,

"They are having fun. I'm gonna do my work and get out at 5." Third, age might influence participation as well. Even when employees love to work for Semicon US and identify themselves as a member of the group, older employees may not feel like putting on costumes. In contrast, younger employees are more likely to show interest in the event, sometimes spending a whole weekend in preparation.

Fourth, bonding among a circle of co-workers or in a department might affect the employees' involvement. "Are you gonna dress up this year?" - "I will if you do." Or, "Hey, let's do something for the event!" - "No!"- "Please. It's gonna be fun. X and Y are going, too." - "Really? All right." Some circles of co-workers might be voluntarily passionate about the event. Some employees, on the other hand, might take part because they are asked to by their co-workers or by a leader in their circle. At the departmental level, interpersonal relationships among employees might influence their contribution to the event as well.

One department does not do anything (no departmental decoration whatsoever) every year because it has been suffering from an internal conflict. This conflict became obvious when I interviewed several employees in this department. An American manager and her subordinates (all Americans) were not getting along. The subordinates expressed that she was a perfectionist and did not allow them to make mistakes; she made many negative comments, such as "This is wrong," "That is wrong," and "This is not good enough." The manager was aware of this tension and of the fact that she was aggressive; however, she blamed the supervisor who works with the manager and her subordinates, saying that the supervisor does not have strong leadership skills. She says, "I have to look like a

bad person" to get her subordinates to do their work. Although the manager travels a lot, the tension in the department is high when she is in the office. Her subordinates described the atmosphere as "stressful," "oppressive," "defensive," and "intimidating." Since the interviews, one employee, who had been with the department longer than any other employee, moved to a different department. This internal conflict seems to weaken the level of energy in the department and does not make the employees feel like participating in the event as a group.

The fifth reason for participating in the Halloween event might be just that some employees simply want to be different and have fun not every year but sometimes. Not many people like to be an annual character whom other employees are anxious to see every year. They might make others laugh so hard by putting on a silly costume one year and winning the award, but they might take a break other years. Sixth, as the Japanese manager mentioned previously, some employees might feel embarrassed or not know how fun the event is until they actually participate in it. Finally, some employees might be too busy to care for Halloween.

The Japanese executive member stresses the importance of participating in the Halloween event as a way of emphasizing cooperation with American employees, developing reciprocal relationships, and encouraging group harmony. In his perspective, Japanese employees should comply with Americans and make them happy to show that they are a part of the Semicon US group and that they enjoy working with Americans. Since American employees work very hard and cooperate with the Japanese company, the Japanese employees should reciprocate

by showing their willingness to be a part of the US group. Complaints about Japanese employees from HR were that they did not participate in the Halloween event and other company-wide events, such as the company picnic or the All Employee Meeting (see discussion in 6.3.1.10). There were also complaints about the tendency of Japanese employees to discard emails sent to Semicon US employees without reading them.[18] The Japanese manager might have wanted to discourage the idea that Japanese employees were not cooperative. Although he was in Japan on the day of Halloween, he would have been one of the judges if he had been in Semicon US.

Community Service. Semicon US also actively participates in community service. One of its missions is to be a good corporate citizen by nurturing the culture of the local community, which also promotes localization of the company. The employees are strongly encouraged to take part in community activities, such as city marathons, cleaning public parks, and providing food to shelters and victims of natural disasters. A few cardboard boxes for the food drives are frequently placed in front of the main lobby and the elevators. Semicon US is also an active volunteer team for a welfare service called Meals-on-Wheels. The members, consisting of both Japanese and American employees who are willing to help, go in pairs that always include a Japanese and an American employee. The pairs pick up hot lunches from local churches and deliver them to

[18] When I conducted an intercultural communication class for Japanese employees, I collected some concerns from a HR American manager as well as Japanese administrative assistants (see discussion about issues the assistants had). The Japanese executive manager was one of the participants in the training. He took this issue seriously, apologized to me by putting his head down, saying "*Sumimasen* (I'm sorry)," and asked other Japanese participants, "*Nande? Omaera deroyo na*. (Why? You guys should take part in this.)"

the homebound elderly and disabled in the community during their lunch hour. This kind of community service during work hours is rarely seen in Japan, where employees are restricted to the office (see more discussion later). Japanese employees, especially those who want to get involved in community activities and promote community service, are members of this group, regardless of their busy schedule. It is a great opportunity for the Japanese employees to meet American employees with whom they have never worked before, to establish relationships with them through their common interests and goals for the community, to share time driving together and getting lost many times, and to learn different or perhaps hidden aspects of American culture. One Japanese member said about their experience: "*Karuchaa shokku ga atta. Amerika no mazushii kaisoo no hito to au kikai ga imamade ni nakatta seika bikkuri shiteshimatta.* (I felt culture shock. I was surprised because I have never had a chance to meet with American people in the lower class.)" Not everyone that benefits from Meals-on-Wheels is poor; the majority, however, consists of disabled or blind people who do not have a job or elderly persons who cannot afford assisted living. The Japanese employees are able to see the individualistic and independent aspect of American culture, particularly in blind people who live alone. In contrast, in Japan it is very difficult and extremely inconvenient for blind or disabled people to live alone or go outside since facilities are often not accommodated for them. Community service helps Japanese employees experience a unique part of American culture by engaging with it rather than just by hearing about it or seeing it on television or in the newspaper.

The above American-dominant cultural practices are revealed on the organizational level to fulfill the needs and satisfaction of locally hired employees and to emphasize and respect the locality. The Halloween event that is distinct from Japanese culture, indicating an explicit hospitality to the introduction of a unique aspect of American culture, involves active negotiation by Japanese actors and relationality with American employees. The community service "Meals-on-Wheels" not only contributes to local needs but also promotes cultural understanding, learning, and experience profoundly for the Japanese employees. The next example indicates American emancipation influenced by locally hired employees, with which the Japanese expatriates feel that they cannot control or have the right to control.

Relaxed Workplace. Japanese expatriates like freedom and a relaxed atmosphere in Semicon US, but they also make the expatriates uneasy. In the headquarters in Japan, every employee has to come in, take a break, and have lunch during a regulated time. A bell rings to indicate the beginning and the end of a work hour, break, and lunch in the company. When going out of the office, the employees need to submit paperwork and receive an agreement from their managers. In contrast, although regular hours for non-exempt employees are from eight to five in Semicon US (no flextime), they can sometimes change it according to a personal schedule, hours worked in a week or their manager's schedule. Even though the employees are required to contact someone in their department if they are late for work, a half hour to one hour grace time seems to be considered not late. Furthermore, the employees can take a break and have a

one-hour lunch break anytime they want. Again, since they can adjust time according to their preference or schedule, they can take a half-hour lunch break one day and leave the company early, come late, or take a one and a half-hour break on a different day. If the employees have a medical appointment, they can leave the office without any permission from their managers, though they have to tell someone in their department about their leave. Each employee submits a self-report of how many hours he/she worked for a week. While Japanese expatriates worry about this loose structure of time and the system that relies on employees' honesty toward the self-report, they appear to enjoy this freedom and anonymity. In Semicon US, no one complains how late the expatriates would come. Their managers overlook even the fact that they show up around 9:30 or 10, for they know that the Japanese are working late every night. On the contrary, it does not matter how late they work in Japan headquarters. Even if they worked till midnight, they would have to come in at the regular time on the next day. Another surprise for Japanese assignees in Semicon US is that some American employees work while listening to the radio. This practice is completely absent in Japanese business offices where people work compactly with a serious rather than relaxed or enjoyable attitude. Whereas some Japanese assignees question whether this relaxed atmosphere is good for the company, they try to justify that this is America, therefore they should follow the local way: "*Go ni ireba go ni shitagae* (When in Rome, do as the Romans do)", as many Japanese employees often say.

Crisis Management. This relaxed, or laid-back, atmosphere tends to influence other areas and becomes the most criticized feature of Semicon US by

Japanese expatriates; namely, they associate it with a lack of crisis management and no sense of saving expenses. The Semiconductor industry undergoes downturns and upturns every couple of years, called a "Silicon Cycle." Many Japanese assignees have experienced an extremely severe recession, when they did not receive a bonus they expected for paying loans, and a very profitable time when they received an extra bonus. The parent company with approximately forty years of history expects these fluctuations. In Japanese eyes, Semicon US is somewhat insensitive to such a cycle while everyone in the semiconductor industry should be aware of this. One Japanese expatriate said that people in Semicon US use money over "unnecessary" things. When the company was just moving into a difficult economic situation, he criticized Semicon US, saying that it especially had no idea what it should do during the downturn. He pointed out a new phone in the meeting room that had just arrived a few days ago and said:

> *Kyokutan na hanashi desukedo, kono denwa ni shitemo soodesho. Konna fukeeki no toki ni atarashii denwa ni suru hitsuyoo wa nai. Sooyuu kanri ga dekitenai. Maa, ima kore o tsuketa kara dookoo to kawaru wake ga naindesuyo. Tada, shoohinkachi o kangaete inai to omoimasu. Kooyuukoto yarunowa Amerika ga ichiban kencho desuyo. (Jyapan Semikon mo) Keiki ga iitoki wa osaete naidesu kedo, keiki ga warui toki wa keiki ga warui nami no ugoki o shitemasu karane. Nihon dattara kangaerarenai desuyo, kore (atarashii denwa). Ima tamatama me ni haittan desukedo.*
>
> This might be extreme, but this phone tells you [how Semicon US handles the recession], right? There is no need that we should install new phones during this depression. Semicon US cannot manage such things. Nothing will change whether or not we use this new phone at this time. I think that it [Semicon US] is not thinking about the value of merchandise. This kind of action is most frequently seen in America [American subsidiaries]. We [in Japan Semicon] do not save money when the business is in a good shape, yet we act like we are in recession while our business suffers. This [pointing at a new phone] is unthinkable in Japan. I just happened to talk about this since I saw it, though.

As he stated, when the economy is superior, employees in the Japan Semicon Group worldwide receive extra bonuses in addition to the regular bonus that is normally provided twice a year. Further, employees can travel more, offsite meetings are held in a nice hotel, and the budgets for company activities increase. During the downturn, bonuses can be cut, traveling is discouraged, and company recreations are cancelled. Another Japanese assignee also described how differently people in Semicon US and people in Japan Semicon tend to react to the depression:

> *Nihon no hoo ga itami o motto kanjiteru to omoimasu. Kochira wa nihon kara iwareteru kara shooga naina, to yuufuu ni yatteruto uketotte imasuga. Nihon no hoodewa ohiru yasumi ni rooka no denki o keshitari, toire no peepaa taoru o haishi shitari, shinbun toruno o yametari, sokomade yattemashita.*
>
> I think Japan [Semicon] suffers from depression more [than the US]. Here [Semicon US] just tends to follow whatever the parent company asks [to save expense] because it cannot refuse to comply the parent's company's favor. In Japan [Semicon], we even turned the light off in the hallway during a lunch break. No paper towels in the rest rooms or newspaper were provided.

While the Japanese expatriate illustrated how Japanese employees can cooperate with and show understanding toward expense reductions, he tried to understand this local or US behavior and restructure his intercultural experiences:

> *Tada chigau nowa Amerika dewa denki-ryookin ga yasui kara, denki o keshitemo taishita setsuyaku niwa naranai. De, denki o keshitari shitemo, moraru ga hontoo ni keiki ga waruinda, tte yuukotode, tabun nihon dattara dashoo keiki ga warukutemo ganbatte norikirootte yuufuuni naruto omoundesukedo, Amerika dato kono kaisha wa abunai kara yameyoo toka yuufuuni nacchaukamo shirenai. Sonohen mo atte sokomade yattenakatta nokamo shiremasen kedomo, zuibun sagarimashita. Mina-san sooyuu jyootai demo monitaa tsukeppanashi de*

kaeru hito wa ippai irushi… Kocchi wa zuibun jiyuu o ooka shiteru to omoimasu.

> But, the difference is that even if we turn the light off [in Semicon US], we cannot save a whole lot of money since electricity charges are inexpensive in America. If we are asked to turn off the light, we can definitely tell that the business is in a very bad condition. I think that we [Japanese] will try our best to get through the recession whereas in America employees might become discontent and leave the company, feeling extreme crisis. Due to this reason, I believe that we didn't do this much painstaking saving [in Semicon US] although some expenses decreased. In such a condition, however, there are a quite many people [in Semicon US] who go home with their monitors on… I think people here enjoy freedom a lot.

In this, the Japanese expatriate compared how workers in Japan Semicon and Semicon US handled the recession and illuminated how much pain Japan Semicon went through. He was afraid that people in Semicon US would moralistically experience a gloomy workplace condition and feel as if they wanted to resign; whereas Japanese workers in the Japan headquarters can collaboratively make an effort to endure the inconvenience caused by the economy. In other words, the Americans might interpret such severe cutbacks as signs that the company would collapse and look for a new job. On the other hand, the Japanese might stay with the company, in spite of severe cutbacks and inconvenience, not so much due to their feelings of loyalty or attachment with the company but due to their collaborative challenge and group spirit to survive the recession with other employees who have been working for the same company for a long period of time. As shown, a tendency of Semicon US's over expenses and difficulty tolerating extreme cutback can create a more relaxed work environment; whereas it tends to be criticized as "spoiled," "dependent," and "immature" by the

Japanese expatriates who came from the company that underwent more intense agony.

Rules and regulations, which follow the US government and local standards, of course, are followed partly to avoid financial sanctions. In this sense, they are non-negotiable by the Japanese management. Not all such policies have an impact on individual practices. One policy, which is significant but distinct from Japanese culture and involves active interaction with Japanese employees, concerns sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment. Semicon US is dedicated to preventing harassment, including sexual harassment, and discrimination on the basis of sex or sexuality. Harassment is also forbidden by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and state regulations. A manager in HR provides a two-hour-class on preventing harassment, called "Workplace Diversity Program," to employees every three weeks. Although the classes are often cancelled due to the insufficient number of participants (ten participants at minimum), this attempt indicates that the company is concerned about this issue. The main reason is that Japanese expatriates receive no training about sexual harassment prior to being assigned in the US. The English manual distributed to employees includes basic principles, true or false self-assessment questions, legal issues, federal laws prohibiting job discrimination, the spectrum of behaviors that could be considered harassment, policy implementation and procedures, and self-assessment questions about what participants learned in the class.

However, Japanese employees rarely participate in the class because it is too difficult for them to decipher all the concepts and policies in English; I also found it difficult in taking this diversity class even after living in the US eight years. Later on, it was clear that many Japanese expatriates did not know that calling someone “Girl,” “Sweetie,” “Doll,” “Babe,” or “Honey” could be considered harassment. In Japan forceful physical contacts, unfair treatment, display of sexual objects, and persistent sexual requests, rather than “how people call others,” are focused. In fact, one Japanese expatriate was almost sued by his assistant in Semicon US. According to him, there were two incidents. The first incident happened when his assistant was on her business trip in Japan. He called her in the middle of the night from the US and said something very persistently. He did not tell me what he said to her, yet he said that he was drunk. The second incident that became evident for his assistant to appeal the case was his email sent to her, starting “My (his assistant’s name).” When he was asked to come to HR, he learned for the first time that his assistant was going to sue him. Since he did not want to trouble Japan Semicon, he told HR that he would do anything to avoid a lawsuit. As a result, she became no longer his assistant and he received training from HR and completed daily reports to correct his behaviors. On the US standard, this is a legitimate sexual harassment charge; whereas his Japanese sense was that he was lonely because he had left his family in Japan, so he thought that his assistant would understand his feeling.

The Japanese expatriate attacked this American practice rather than reconstructing his Japanese way. He remarked, “*Amerika no jyosei wa wagamama*

desune. Amerika no kyooiku wa yokunai desuyo. Zentaiteki ni Amerika no jyosei wa gaman ga dekinai desune. Ofisu demo kitanai kotoba o tsukatterushi, hito o hanii toka suwiitii taka tsukattewa ikenainoni yonde masukarane. (American women are selfish. American education is not good. Overall, American women cannot be tolerant. They use dirty words and call someone honey or sweetie in the office even though they are prohibited from using them in the office.)" Clearly, he misinterpreted some concepts that led to harassment. When American employees call each other "Babe" or "Girl" in the office, they are in the mutual relationships in which addressees are comfortable receiving such naming by taking it as a joke or a sign of friendliness and informality. For this reason, the impact toward the addressee is not strong at all. In the case of the Japanese expatriate's sexual harassment case, he obviously failed to behave professionally according to the US workplace standard and misinterpreted the relationship he had with his assistant. It is also possible that the expatriate used the friendly words to his assistant that he sometime heard in the office without correctly understanding the impact and the proper usage of the English vocabulary. Although what he had done to his assistant is not appropriate in Japan, it would hardly become a case in Japan either, for there was no direct physical involvement with her. His conduct was actualized virtually but not physically. The manager might have just wanted to have someone who would listen and understand his lonesome feelings, and his assistant might have looked kind and supportive to him. The impact that she received from him, however, was too severe to comfortably engage in her work. As the manager in the training repeatedly emphasized, the impact, not the intent,

matters. His account, “American women cannot be tolerant,” might suggest that his conducts are nothing serious in Japan compared to forceful physical contacts or constant sexual requests that are considered much more problematic in Japan. Japanese employees seem to fear not necessarily American women’s false accusation but their oversensitivity that they cannot be aware.

A common complaint, relating to sexual harassment, is about Japanese engineers’ screen savers. Although it is not so much a problem in Semicon US, HR sometimes receives a complaint from other subsidiaries or factories in the US. As a result, a manager in HR needs to visit a subsidiary and check the office early in the morning or late at night to investigate what kinds of screen savers are being used. Japanese engineers who are mostly male in Japan may have not realized how indirect physical objects could become a source of sexual harassment in the US where there are a quite few female engineers.

Job interviews also have to be conducted based on appropriateness to the US workplace, which differs from Japanese practice. Compared to a Japanese job interview in which questions about marriage status, age, and the number of the children are commonly asked, such questions are forbidden in the American workplace. Although American managers try to warn Japanese interviewers about questions that they should not ask the applicants in the interview, they are sometimes surprised to hear unexpected comments from the Japanese expatriates. For example, when a Japanese manager and a recruiter from HR were interviewing a female applicant, he said to her, “You look good for fifty-four.” The recruiter was so surprised that she could not think of what to say to make up

for it. Another example is when a Japanese expatriate tried to choose an assistant for himself. He went to see his American manager and mentioned that one of the interviewees was “crippled.” He was concerned about the inconvenience or difficulty that she might experience when carrying heavy files. He asked his manager if he should tell the interviewee about the disability as a reason for rejection. His manager was surprised, saying, “No no no. You cannot do that,” and coached him how to properly turn her down.

Although Japanese expatriates know about the seriousness of sexual harassment in the US, they do not understand the details about it. Their behaviors are likely controlled by the assumption that they do not want to be sued, and there is a great deal of uncertainty. One Japanese expatriate said that he could sort of tell the image of sexual harassment, yet he does not know what he should do individually. Therefore, he tries not to speak to American female employees and never gives a word of praise. He cannot afford the time to make the effort to talk to American females by selecting words that are not considered as sexual harassment. He would rather be regarded as not affable or sociable by Americans than get himself into trouble, he emphasizes. In fact, it will be difficult and take time for Japanese expatriates to get used to comments that they make, understand difficult policies or hidden meanings of English words, and use or not use the words that can be considered harassment depending on a relationship. On the other hand, some Japanese employees tend to be more careless with Japanese female employees. One Japanese female employee was annoyed with her manager’s question at the end of each day, “*Konban no okazu wa nani o tsukurun*

desuka? (What are you going to cook for dinner?)" Perhaps he was simply curious about what she would cook for her American husband, because he had never asked me, a single Japanese female, such a question, even though I was working for him too. The manager stopped asking the question after she began to avoid answering it, saying softly and with a smile, "*Shirimasen yo. Sonna koto X-san ni kankei nai jya naidesuka. X-san koso nani o taberundesuka* (I don't know. It has nothing to do with you, X-san. What are YOU going to eat?)" The manager's question might have been considered sexual harassment in the US because it implies sexually discriminated roles and suggests that he might be interested in her.

Layoffs. Specific American practice was also used on the days of the layoffs. Employees who were dismissed could no longer go back to their desks after talking with their managers. Hypothetically, they might go back to their desk and email a grievance letter to their co-workers, they might start screaming, or they might have hidden a gun in the drawer and start shooting. Therefore, without being allowed to return to their desks, they were sent to the front door with an escort and all their belongings were sent to their home later. Most of the Japanese managers were not aware of this practice and impressed with this rigorous but cautious way of dismissing employees. In Japanese sense, no one would think of possibilities that employees might scream or possess guns in their drawers, for they are not part of their ordinary habit, practice, or surveillance.

Although layoffs were avoided in Semicon US and it did not announce that it would exercise layoffs, some American employees said that they instantly

knew that they were going to be terminated as soon as they received a phone call from their managers. Since this layoff is an unfamiliar practice for the Japanese expatriates, American managers instead talked to their American subordinates and explained a discharge allowance for them. One Japanese manager was with the American manager who explained to his subordinate. He was surprised to hear that one of the laid-off employees frankly said, "I have been in this [semiconductor] industry for thirty years, so I understand." He commented that no one in Japan would be able to say this because they would rather take it personally. Since layoffs are still rare in Japan and are avoided as much as possible to maintain the company's reputation, laid-off employees are likely to believe that the company has betrayed them. On the contrary, in countries like the US where layoffs are a normal part of business practices, people might habitualize to it and condemn the economic situation rather than the company.

Job Responsibility. American employees' focused view toward their responsibilities is often discussed among Japanese assignees. In Japan, people try to understand the big picture and to see how their responsibilities help and promote other areas of business. Their practice of job rotation and the intensive new hire orientation[19] make it easy to learn the business from the ground up. On the other hand, in the US, people have specific expertise and clear responsibilities, and they do not necessarily feel the need to understand the assignments and responsibilities of other individuals, who are expert in their areas. It is great that Americans are likely to be knowledgeable in their specialties and fulfill their

[19] The new hire orientation tends to last at least one month for general information up to six months for specific technical skills depending on the company.

responsibilities. However, some Japanese assignees want them to go beyond that line and believe that American employees are unaware of the big picture and are not dedicated to the business as a whole. To describe this more specifically, people in Japan Semicon generally understand what needs to be done after testing a machine, receiving an order, and installing the machine. However, in US Semicon people rarely know (yet) about the entire process or all the procedures. A Japanese manager maintained that in Semicon US, if a person was in charge of sales, he/she was not concerned about what should be done after selling the machine; because from that point, people in service, not people in sales, took care of the customer. Workers in Semicon US are focused, but they are inclined to draw a clear line between each employee's responsibility and do not try to interfere with someone else's job.

This discrepancy might be due to different job practices between Japan and the US. In the US, Americans might identify with the job, such as sales, accountant, or customer service. Whenever they change companies, they bring their career with them. On the other hand, one's expertise or specialty does not always matter in Japan, because employees receive training from the company. In Japan, college graduates are main job candidates and they are recruited once a year, starting summer to fall, and everyone starts from their official beginning date of working, April 1st. Japanese companies believe that fresh college graduates are the best potential labor "because they were more easily molded to suit a company's requirements" (Nakane, 1970, p. 16). For this reason, required skills are not usually stated in a job opening announcement. The companies

believe in educating and training people within the company (Hamada, 1991). Frankly speaking, even if a person majored in English literature at college, he/she could be working as a computer engineer. Furthermore, when staying in the same company for a long time, employees are rotated to various jobs and departments; therefore, they naturally learn general practices in the company. This difference suggests that Japanese tend to identify with the company, while Americans tend to identify with a career.

There is another American-dominated cultural practice relating to the job responsibility that Japanese expatriates want to change to Japan Semicon practice: how to handle customers. A Japanese sales manager put it this way: Japan Semicon was an organization that provided thorough service and support to the customers, which made a difference and made Japan Semicon stand out from other companies. In fact, when the company was just established, this strategy made it possible to survive while competing with major Japanese trading companies. Japanese employees are proud of the method. Although this practice does not sound cultural or special when comparing it to other companies, a difference can be found in personal attachment to customers and products that the employees are handling. The Japanese manager insisted that even if employees in sales were good at selling products, that wouldn't be enough. He argued that sales people would need to learn about the products and also have concern about after-service care, rather than disengaging from their customers after selling a product. Hence, the sales manager hoped that sales people in US subsidiaries would

engage in their work like a project manager and take care of the customer from the very beginning to the end.

Similarly, a Japanese design engineer was disappointed to see that people in sales in Semicon US were selling machines, which would cost millions of dollars, without really knowing them. From a Japan Semicon perspective, sales people should at least know the products they are selling. Sales people in Semicon US tend to think that their job is done after they sell a machine and send an order form to the factory. Japanese engineers design hundreds of machines in the last few years, yet they still remember all the machine numbers. While Japanese engineer feel a strong attachment to the machines, sales people in Semicon US tend not remember even the order form that they themselves filled out. The factory in Japan has given up looking for Americans' passion and enthusiasm in becoming familiar with the machines, but the Japanese engineer was determined to change the situation before he would return to Japan.

Some of the American-dominant practices reflect local and host cultural necessities and legitimacy that Semicon US has to adopt without question. Those practices are inescapable to promote localization, attract local people, gain reputation, and be successful in the US. If Semicon US fails to follow American standards, it is likely to invite dreadful events and results, such as being prosecuted or losing business in the US. I have also shown that a regulation, harassment in particular, had individual consequences on both Japanese and American employees. Several examples indicated that Japanese employees tend to misinterpret sexual harassment by adapting Japanese common sense with which

only direct physical contacts are counted. One Japanese, who had learned how powerfully words were taken in the US, tried not to have an unnecessary talk with American female employees because he would not want to get in trouble. Fear and uncertainty, accordingly, might limit interactions between Japanese male and American female employees. Other American-dominant practices are largely influenced by the American work environment and individual pursuits for expertise or specialty within their responsibilities but not general knowledge. These practices are supported by a large number of local employees that are accustomed to their own cultural or business practices, and they are not usually aware of what are like in Japanese work environment and expectations. It might be very difficult to expect a general understanding of Japan Semicon's business practice from American employees who are accustomed to developing their specified careers, rather than broad knowledge of service, according to the US job market expectation. Some Japanese employees, however, are motivated or wish to change this American habit to Japan Semicon way because they believe that a thorough service with a personal commitment to products and customers is special to Japan Semicon and it had brought success to the company in the past.

5.2.2. Japanese-Dominant Cultural Practices

Some Japanese-dominant cultural practices are brought into Semicon US in alignment with Japan Semicon's philosophical positions. They are sometimes used indisputably not because of local appropriateness or legality but because of a feeling that a Japanese subsidiary should follow a Japanese way. The Japanese practices are heavily seen in management philosophy.

Customer Satisfaction. A management philosophy booklet created by the parent company is included in the new employee manual and is distributed globally in order that employees in the Japan Semicon group worldwide can work with one mindset. While some Americans show a preference for Japan Semicon philosophy, others show frustration with the company's inability to adopt an American way. American employees and those who have worked for other semiconductor companies are impressed with the emphasis on high-quality products, this great technology, and positive relationships with customers. One American manager said that it was great to work for a company that establishes a great relationship with customers since the company where he worked before had an adversarial relationship with their customers. Some American employees see the philosophy as a blend of Japanese and American business philosophy. One American supervisor said:

> It [management philosophy] is more Japanese but it helps a lot. A higher up management realizes that they have to abandon it [Japanese philosophy] because they are operating the company in the US. Japanese management philosophy is very good, but they realize that they are not in Japan. So at times, they have to change it or get rid of it temporarily for case by case. That's actually very good… Within our business unit, how we operate with customer service and sales services is most important and we concern on quality. That's the highest one that I think impressed me and impressed the customers the most. Overall the philosophy is heavily used by the Japanese. For Americans, quality is OK and that's the thing to shoot for. But, for Japanese everything is still like you don't do anything without first thinking of quality. American companies will think about to get it done quickly and to get it in market first. For Japanese companies, the quality is the up most concern and timing and speed to the market is second.

The American supervisor realizes that some modification is necessary because the company is operating in the US, yet the Japanese managers especially emphasize

quality and customer relationships. Customer satisfaction is especially reinforced during meetings by Japanese managers and quite often by American executive managers as well. Customers' response to Semicon US service is carefully examined through customer reports and is discussed with top-level managers in all departments to make sure that each department meets their satisfaction. Further, the Japanese way of maintaining a relationship with customers is often communicated and emphasized by Japanese expatriates. Case in point, when customers began canceling orders during the recession, an executive Japanese manager asked all assistant managers and general managers in each BU to be sensitive to their customers' economic situations and not to solicit cancellation fees. He said that this was how Japan Semicon handled valued customers.

In Japanese business jargon, this practice is called "*naniwabushi*[20] (sentimental fondness)," which means doing business with loyalty and feeling, or being flexible and handling circumstances differently, on a case-by-case basis. Rather than dealing with the customer pragmatically and logically based on the contract, Japanese employees tend to see their customers humanistically and emotionally. They try to understand customers' hardships and show understanding by not asking for payment even when the payment due date has passed. When a company is understanding of a customer's unique circumstances, future customer loyalty is fostered. In this way, the company tries to establish a reciprocal relationship with customers. It is sometimes difficult for American

[20] This phrase is often used to negotiate; it consists of three phrases. The opening is called *kikkake*, which gives the general background of the story and describes what the people involved are thinking or feeling. Then the *seme* gives an account of critical events. Finally the *urei* expresses pathos and sorrow at what has happened or what is being requested.

employees to understand and accommodate this Japanese way of doing business, for they tend to think, “Business is business,” and do not handle it emotionally. Although some employees are opposed to this ‘customer satisfaction,’ it is frequently and strongly recommended as a strategy for business success by managers.

People-Oriented Company. In addition to customer satisfaction, employees also enjoy the ‘people-oriented’ aspect of the company, which is also emphasized in the management philosophy. Many employees frequently mentioned, “People are nice here.” One American sales administrative assistant, who used to work for a major American company, expressed how her individuality was valued in Semicon US:

> [Semicon US] treat people very well. From the company I came from, that was the one of the reasons I left; we did not have identity, individual identity. I didn’t like the way they treated people… Semicon US treats people very well. I feel a part of my group. I don’t make a decision as far as selling a tool, but I feel very much part of the group. [At my previous company] they did not have a very good people skill, as far as courtesy and professionalism, towards all employees. Whether or not you are janitor or manager, you should not be treated badly. But, here everyone is treated very well.

She’d had a bitter experience with her previous company that likely cared more about whether she accomplished her assignments or tasks rather than who she was. In Semicon US, she feels that she is treated as a person who has a life, feelings, emotions, dreams, and opinions, besides just coming to work for money. Although she does not have the authority or power to make decisions, she is satisfied with feeling like a part of the group.

Monetary Incentives. As I briefly mentioned earlier, transplanting a cultural practice persists because of its strength and because there is nothing comparable in the new environment. There is one Japanese policy that Semicon US is not allowed to change regardless of the local preference or appropriateness. Semicon US is not allowed to provide monetary incentives or commissions to the employees. To compensate qualified employees, the company selects "Employees of the Year" and provides some money (e.g. 100,000 yen) and a travel award. For competent sales people, the company does not use the commission system, but it raises their base salary or adjusts their annual bonuses to recognize their accomplishment. In one BU meeting, several American managers suggested individual monetary rewards. However, a Japanese executive member, who recently arrived claimed, that it would go against Japan Semicon's philosophy. He also understood that people in the US have monetary goals and become motivated by financial acknowledgement, but he suggested offering qualified employees weekend trips or something that did not appear to be a monetary reward. In fact, the top executives in Japan discussed allocating one million dollars to qualified employees. However, the president denied this proposal on the ground that it was very difficult to judge who was qualified and who was not, that not everyone might be motivated by the monetary reward, and therefore that it might encourage unfairness. Since motivational methods differ from region to region, the president might allow changing the policy locally to hire and retain qualified employees in the future, but it is still difficult for him to give up the philosophy rooted in Japan Semicon for forty years.

5.3. BICULTURAL PRACTICES

In bicultural practices, multiple cultures are emphasized maintaining their own fundamental features. In other words, both cultural practices exist side by side. In Semicon US, Japanese and American cultural characteristics co-exist to satisfy both Japanese and American employees, demonstrate and contrast both roots.

Building. For example, the building of Semicon US is located on a hill and has a beautiful view of the town. The building is flat; consisting of two stories and one ground floor, and horizontally long. The light blue building with its outside covered with glass is beautifully integrated between a green hill and a blue sky. It is a modern building that gives the impression of a sophisticated high tech company. As soon as you open the front door to check in with a receptionist by walking into the main lobby, you will see a big Japanese statue standing in the middle of the hall. The lobby is spacious and bright but very quiet as if the Japanese statue had kept reminding the employees of dignity and sublimity. This is the time when people are struck with the parent's root of Semicon US while its spaciously smoothed out building on the hill does not carry Japanese-ness by its look. I felt a considerable gap between the Japanese statue and an American receptionist, who was sharing the same space. However, this Japanese cultural art is replaced with a big Christmas tree at Christmas times, which conveys a happy holiday season. Combinations between the Japanese statue and the receptionist and between the statue and the Christmas tree, hence, communicate distinct

cultural backgrounds by not really blending together but almost competing with each other.

Cafeteria. Biculturalism is also found in the cafeteria. The cafeteria serves a variety of food, including a daily Japanese selection, a few selections of daily western or American food, occasionally Mexican food, and it always offers dishes, such as hamburgers, grilled cheese, French fries, and salad. Japanese dishes are quite popular among not only Japanese but also American employees. On *sushi* day, especially, every other Friday, many employees rush into the cafeteria at 11:30 AM, which is the opening hour, and compete to get a variety of *sushi*. At the western or American food corner, you can choose a main dish, such as meatloaf, beef stew, and pasta with two selections of vegetable and a roll. On a barbeque day, cooks and cashiers wear cowboy hats. Enchiladas and tacos are also popular menu items in the cafeteria. Desserts are available in Japanese and American styles. Although Japanese sweets, such as *daifuku* (rice cake with sweet bean paste inside), are not on a daily selection, when they are out in the cafeteria, they will be eaten quickly. Some Japanese and American employees buy five or six to eat as a snack in the afternoon or to take them home to share with their family members.

The cafeteria is bicultural because Japanese, American, or Mexican food[21] is served in different sections and never mingled together. The cafeteria serves fairly authentic Japanese and American food and never tries to be creative by mixing the two kinds of food. Most of the Japanese employees go straight to the

[21] The Mexican food is regional US food, rather than because of Mexico.

Japanese food section without checking the other menus. They go back to the American food section only if all Japanese dishes are gone, which frequently happens, or they had the same dish at home on the previous night. Some American employees check out the Japanese food. If the Japanese food looks good to them, they might try it, but if it doesn't, they go back to the American food. Some American employees eat only a portion of the Japanese food with other American or Mexican dishes. Some American employees, of course, never touch or care about Japanese food. Availability of Japanese food is one of the important factors that influence Japanese expatriates' satisfaction in the US. Usunier (1998) extends this issue more carefully and argues that oral pleasure (access to one's native language and eating and drinking habits) influences expatriates' overall experience.

Free association is seen in the cafeteria. Roughly, a group of Japanese employees eats lunch together and a group of Americans eats lunch together. More specifically, groups of Japanese expatriates eat together. A group of Japanese female assistants eats together. Groups of African American employees eat together. A group of executive members eats together. Groups of temporary workers eat together. Groups of people who work in the same section or department, regardless of their nationalities, eat together. A few married couples eat together. Groups of smoker eat together outside. Some employees eat alone. Some people never eat at the cafeteria and instead bring their lunch to their desks.[22] It varies. Employees usually belong to a group that is comfortable for

[22] Several American employees told me that some Japanese employees considered eating lunch at one's desk as unclean. This is probably because Japanese tend not to eat food at their desks. Even when they bring lunch to work, they tend to take it to the cafeteria. Further, the Japanese office is

them. This comfortableness is likely to stem from common language, ethnicity, department affiliation, similar backgrounds, similar position (i.e., administrative assistants or executive members), similar status (i.e., full-time or temporary), familiarity (i.e. old timers or new hires), or similar interests (i.e., loves playing golf or soccer) to name a few. Some people belong to multiple groups. Those who do not belong to any groups might happen to see someone whom they know in the cafeteria and join the table. If they do not find anyone, they eat alone. A variety of attractions or factors might decide with whom people want and do not want to eat lunch. Wenger (1996) calls this kind of attractions "constellation of practices" through which people see others related, because they are sharing historical roots or artifacts, facing similar conditions, or having members in common (p. 127).

Conference Rooms. Another bicultural aspect of Semicon US is found in names of conference rooms. The name of the conference rooms are chosen after traditional Japanese flower names, such as "*Sakura* (cherry blossom)," "*Ayame* (iris)," or "*Kiku* (chrysanthemum)," and famous flowers in the region of the United States, such as "Hibiscus," "Magnolia," or "Primrose." American employees remember the Japanese names of conference rooms although most of them do not know what they stand for.

Social Activities. Furthermore, biculturalism exists in social activities. Farewell parties are seen in both Japanese and American cultures, yet in a different fashion and the differences co-exist in Semicon US. Employees in a department usually spend from one and a half hours to two hours for the farewell

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crowded and each desk is small and filled with many things. Employees may not have room to eat there.

lunch during the normal one-hour break. From some of the Japanese assignees' perspective, that is not enough time and it is not relaxing. They cannot fully enjoy it because the time is restricted and they have to go back to the office and continue working. In a Japanese style, people go out after work, eat, and drink until very late. When one of the Japanese administrative assistants left the company, she went out for lunch with American employees in her department and she went to another farewell dinner that her manager planned with a small number of Japanese workers the same evening. While American employees tend to choose lunch or happy hour for a farewell party, the Japanese tend to choose dinner sitting in one table and enjoy eating food, drinking, and having conversations for longer hours. This Japanese way of going out after work, staying till 10:30 to 11:00 at night, and sometimes going to *karaoke* after that, is a reproduction of Japanese outing rituals. Having lunch on someone's special occasion is *ajikenai* (dry, impersonal, or emotionless) for many Japanese. They prefer nighttime for this special occasion away from office work and enjoy relaxing conversations. Since Japanese employees in Semicon US do not go out for drinks after work as often as they do in Japan, these farewell parties are special – a little sense of living as if they were back in Japan. This way, Japanese employees maintain their cultural practices and also participate in lunch with American employees.

Work Habits. One big difference between Japanese and Americans is found with regard to their work habits. There was a misconception or general understanding that if people are working late in business, they may be considered inefficient in the US, whereas they are considered as hardworking in Japan.

Although many employees begin to see that the above statement does not hold true, a phenomenological difference exists. The majority of the Japanese expatriates mentioned that "*Karera wa hayaku kaerimasune.* (They [Americans] go home early.)," meaning at the hour around 5 or 6pm, as their first impression of Semicon US or their experience of cultural differences. Although they knew this before they came to the US, it still struck them strongly. In contrast, many Americans stated, "They [Japanese employees] stay late." However, Japanese assignees start realizing that just because Americans go home early does not mean that they do not work hard. Some American employees work long hours, like Japanese expatriates, but in a different timeframe. Normally, many Japanese expatriates work from 9am to 10pm whether or not they are single, married, or have children. On the other hand, American work habit seems to change depending on their marriage status or children. For example, some Americans come to work early morning before 7am and stay till 8pm or later. One American assistant manager typically comes in at 6:30 in the morning and leaves at 8:30 in the evening. She said, "I am lucky that I don't have a kid and my husband is understanding." Another American manager answered, "I work a lot… I get to work around 7, if not earlier, and leave at 8 or 9pm everyday." Both of the managers are married, yet they do not have children. They work for 13 to 14 hours a day, not by staying late at the office but by going in early in the morning. Another tendency is that American employees who are single tend to work late. After they get married and have children, though, they go home as soon as they can. In such cases, they still work at home after their children go to bed. One

American technical support manager, who has three children, stated, “I try to leave here by at least 5:30. Back when I was single, I stayed till 11 or midnight… If I leave here at 5 or 5:30, I can be home by 6 or 6:30. If I need, I still can call Japan from home. I can dial into the office and use a tie-line call for long distance. Or you can email from home.”

Another American manager with two children also mentioned that he usually went home at 5pm so that he could have dinner with his children. Yet, it does not mean that his job on that day is finished. After his children go to bed, he works for a couple more hours at home. It does not matter where he is making a phone call as long as he is calling. If he chose to build a relationship with his boss by staying late in the company, he would risk the relationship with his family. He tries to have a balance between his work and family. He and his Japanese boss used to joke that they were working different shifts because he would come in early and leave at 5pm while his boss would come in late and stay until midnight. This does not mean, nonetheless, that Japanese do not care about their families. It is just a different way of expressing love. It is similar to a notion of proxemics (Hall, 1959). Most of the Japanese parents, noncontact people, do not hug, kiss, or often say “I love you” to express their affection to their children or families, instead they express their love in an indirect manner. They might ask how the family members are doing, peak in on their sleeping children late at night, care for them without using words—ways of expressing love indirectly. The bottom line is that Japanese tend to work late to support their families. And their families usually understand such work habits as expressions of love.

Other explanations of different work habits between Japanese and Americans are also available. During a roundtable discussion with an executive manager in Japan Semicon, one young employee asked him how he could cope with a cultural difference with overseas employees who go home at 5 or 6 o'clock. The executive manager allocated the reason for Japanese employees' habit to a poor ability to prioritize:

> In the sense of work efficiency, I feel it is difficult to rank Westerners and Japanese, and say who is better. I would say, however, that Japanese are rather poor in setting priorities, and then performing work in the sequence of importance.

Then, he explained why Japanese tend to stay late to do their work:

> In my opinion, Japanese culture sanctions this type of behavior. There are differences in culture, and based on that, there are differences in values. Therefore, in the midst of a culture which attaches extremely high value to going home and dining together with one's family, as well as seeing and talking with one's children, the home has higher value than remaining on and on at the workplace. Since this is the case, workers take it upon themselves to set the priorities for the work which must be performed that day, and strive from the morning to get it all done. With that, they then go home at 5:00. From the Japanese perspective, if you don't go home at 5:00, then it figures that you should be able to get more work done [laughs]. While this is certainly true, what actually happens with Japanese is that from the morning on they have in mind to remain at the job until late [laughs]. Maybe once or twice a week there will be instances when it is definitely necessary to stay on late to complete jobs which suddenly pop up, but the workers who remain on in this pattern are staying late every day. What I am saying, therefore, is that they complete their time allocation till night when first mapping out personal schedules from the morning hours on.

According to the executive, Japanese work hours are already set up from 8 in the morning to midnight. Therefore, when they determine the priority, they already calculate extra hours in order to get it done rather than trying to finish it up within

the hours. A famous belief, which many Americans try to make a Japanese habit, is that Japanese employees cannot leave until their boss leaves. It may not be that extreme, yet one Japanese technical support manager recognized this cultural sanction:

> *Mawari ga minna soo dakara. Futsuu sokomade shinakute ii to omoundesuga ne. Minna shimasu yone. Osoku made nokotte. Sooyuu bunka ga atte hayaku kaeruto, aitsu sabotterundewa naika toka miraremasushi ne. Betsu ni sonotame ni nokotteru wake jya naindesukedo. Nanika atta toki ni kaisha no hoo ni meiwaku ga kakaru to ikenaishi.*
>
> Everyone around me stays late [in Japan]. I think they work too much. But everybody does that… In such a culture, if I go home early, people tend to look at me like I am loafing. It doesn't mean that I stay late because of that, but if something happens, I don't want to make trouble for my company.

Thus, culturally people tend to consider people who go home early as lazy or not working hard in Japan. Also, this individual is afraid of getting the company into trouble by not being available after hours.

Some Japanese expatriates have learned another reason for this difference in work habits, which is related to different customers that they are dealing. The Japanese employees in Japan handle Japanese customers, and American employees handle American customers in the US. Those customers are basically different in nature. Several Japanese assignees explained that in Japan, if there is a job that they have to finish by today, they will finish it no matter how late it gets because the customer is waiting for it. However, in the US, even though employees have a job that must be completed today, they will go home when the time comes because the customer also goes home after hours. The customers in

the US no longer wait for the work that they asked for after hours, whereas the customers in Japan will wait until they receive it.

Although many Japanese expatriates stay late in Semicon US, many others are adopting the American work habit. They rarely go home at 5 or 6 o'clock even if they have children, but many go home by 8 or 9 o'clock, and they appreciate the time that they can spend with their families. They also take vacations, which they rarely did in Japan, and travel with their families ("family service"). One Japanese expatriate indicated that he has realized that he is working for his family since he came to the US, for he saw that American employees cherished their families. He learned the importance of family from them and began spending time with his family. Some of them are afraid of losing this precious time with their families once they return to Japan. Therefore, they feel that they want to provide family service as much as they can while they are in the US. One Japanese employee who could not adopt the American work habit said, "*Kazoku no tame ni hayaku kaeru amerikajin o sonkei shimasu ne. Subarashii koto dato omoimasu. Demo, ore wa yaruto sutoresu ga tamaru daroo kara yaranai.* (I admire American employees who leave early for their families, and I think that's great. But, I cannot do that because if I leave early, I will get frustrated [with the work that I couldn't finish])." Another said, "*Hayaku kaerenai desune. 5ji ikoo ga ichiban shuuchuu dekiru karane.* (I cannot leave early because after 5pm is the time I can really concentrate)," or "*Chanto jibun no shigoto o oete, nihon kara mitomerareu tame nimo osokumade nokoranaito ikemasen ne.* (I have to stay late in order to finish my work and be recognized as valuable by Japan.)" As shown, the Semicon

US workplace has bicultural dimensions representing some Americans in early morning, many American employees during work hours, and many Japanese figures after 5pm. In contrast, Japanese employees are individually different in understanding, experiencing, learning, and acquiring American work habit.

5.4. NEGOTIATED CULTURAL PRACTICES

Negotiated cultural practices blend both Japanese and American perspectives. They may not be able to be distinguished from either one of the two cultures because they might display complex and anonymous appearances. Both Japanese and American cultural practices are intermingled. Employees might choose the best of the two cultures and create a negotiated practice. Often, one of the two practices is used to handle weaknesses in the other culture rather than repainting it to a mono-cultural color.

Simple examples of the negotiated cultural artifact are different kinds of drawings or pictures are up on the wall throughout the Semicon US building. Asian drawings of nature or birds painted with *sumi* (Chinese ink), European watercolor landscapes, and black and white large photographs by a famous American photographer carry a distinctive impression and break into the monotonous office environment. These artifacts are identified with Asian and European styles rather than either Japanese or American.

Groundbreaking Ceremony. Although I previously discussed the company-wide events that were predominately American, it is possible to create a negotiated company event. Just before a construction of the new building started, a “Groundbreaking” ceremony was held the morning of November 29th 2000 in

memory of Semicon US's expansion. The ceremony involved multicultural aspects of Japanese roots; the company served *sake* and southeastern localities of the United States, such as breakfast tacos. One of the vice presidents explained the traditional *sake* barrel-breaking ceremony in his speech. The other speeches given by the president and the other vice president expressed that Semicon US had expanded the business and building thanks to the hard work and dedication of its employees. After the speeches, nine representatives lined up in front with a shovel in their hands wearing construction helmets and dug into the dirt of the land (groundbreaking). Then, they struck three big *sake* barrels with a wooden hammer. The *sake* was distributed from a wooden dipper to a wooden *sake-masu* (a wooden square cup) held by each employee. Memorial goods with Japan Semicon logo on them, including plastic construction helmets, masks, earplugs, key-holders with a compass and a light, blue long rubber-made tubes for stress relief, and *sake-masu*, were distributed to the employees. Many employees enjoyed having *sake* and tacos. Several Japanese employees in fact worked with red faces caused by the alcohol after the ceremony. The American employees, especially, were pleased with a *sake-masu* since it was rare to see or find it in the United States. This groundbreaking ceremony was, thus, the integration of the US local and Japanese cultures.

Open Door Policy. Semicon US's "Open Door" policy especially is adopted to reduce sexual harassment litigations that Japanese companies in the US that tends to get them in trouble. Many of the manager's offices, some conference rooms, and a customer support center are glass-enclosed, which are

often called *fishbowls* since people can always see who is in and what is happening inside from outside. Many Japanese companies in the US have been filed for sexual harassment charges, including a recent case with Mitsubishi Motor Manufacturing of America, Inc. in 1998. Hamada's study (1995) specifically illustrates how Japanese companies tend to be taken advantage of the fact that Japanese managers have little experience in legal issues and training female employees.[23] Although Semicon US has never publicly sued by employees, it uses the similar practice to diminish such predicament.

Layoff. The negotiated cultural practice is sometimes dynamic because it goes through a trial and error process to seek the best practice. The company might try one cultural way, learns it does not work, and tries the other cultural way. This procedure might be repeated by adjusting to a particular circumstance. For example, Semicon US supports a "no layoff" policy. During recession, paid personal leave (PPL) becomes very important. Just like other American companies, a main purpose of PPL for Semicon US is to attract and retain quality employees by providing a paid-time-off benefit. In Semicon US, however, employees are required to use PPL when the industry's economic condition is severe. When Semicon US experienced a downturn in 1998, it stopped hiring, asked the employees to take PPL, and closed the facility from Christmas to New Years. This practice actually saved several million dollars. Many American

[23] Hamada's anthropological research disclosed that one American female employee used the weakness of the Japanese company, which knowledge was gained from sexual harassment training. On behalf of her financial difficulty, she filed a sexual harassment charge toward her Japanese manager and received a $70,000 out-of-court settlement. Learning from this experience, the company adopted the policy that the blinds and doors of the offices should never be closed.

employees favored this policy and showed appreciation because Semicon US made an effort not to layoff workers. In 2001, Semicon US again faced a severe economic climate, yet this time it was the worst recession ever. The company began asking the employees to take off four-days PPL from late spring of 2001. In September, additional eight-days PPL were required to take. However, in early November the company ended up laying off approximately 10% of its employees and again in the middle of January. Steering clear of implementing layoffs is a Japanese way of attracting qualified employees and showing importance and caring to individuals. Semicon US also adopted this Japanese way, yet it eventually came to the point that it could not help dismissing its employees. Even though Semicon US dismissed employees, the number is minor compared to other American companies which discharge hundreds of employees. Accordingly, Semicon US tries to sustain a “no layoff” policy using the American PPL system, yet it engages in layoff only if it is required.

On the individual cultural learning level, one Japanese expatriate believes that a ‘no layoff’ policy in Semicon US negatively contributes to the emancipated workplace. Before the layoffs were practiced, he perceived that some employees, including Japanese and Americans, were not doing their part mainly because stimulation toward employees was barely found. There are many people whom he wants to ask to resign, he says. He finds such people more in managerial positions. Therefore, he questions about Semicon US which cannot fire people because it inherits a Japanese root. Instead, he believes that a slight severity or tightness, using a layoff policy, would create a more productive and stimulated

workplace. He thinks that this attitude might be regarded as cold or inhuman, yet Semicon US, by also adopting an American corporation trait, should grow to be a company that does not allow any employees to be irresponsible. The Japanese assignee demonstrates his favor in American practice for Semicon US as an American based company and wants to advance more localization. It is interesting to see how he enculturates himself into American business style, reflects what is missing in a Japanese company, and tries not to reproduce similar weaknesses in Semicon US because Semicon US can eliminate such flaws as an American company.

Ringi. The negotiated practice also manifests in a business management style. *Ringi*[24] is an important Japanese business concept and procedure that American employees should know, especially if they are in managerial positions. The word *ringi* is often used among American and Japanese managers. Although Semicon US is allowed to make a certain decision within the company, there are some issues - projects that require higher budgets, new job positions during the recession or that require higher compensation, for example - have to be approved by the Japan headquarters. In such a case, managers have to write a *ringi* to Japan.

[24] *Ringiseido* is defined as a system that describes certain matters and procedures that require upper managers' approval in order to carry out business (Ono, 1960, p. 57). This system began when Japanese companies emulated westernized industry and adopted their traditional family system of organization in the beginning of the Meiji era around 1868. In *ringiseido*, various items regarding organizational change or new ideas are handled depending on the need for approval from a board of directors and the company president. Final decisions are also made by the president and department managers. *Ringisho* (a form of document) used in *ringiseido* is usually created by a department manager; each department, according to occupational abilities such as institutional, materials, or management, examines and submits the *ringisho* to a president. *Ringiseido* was originally developed for the purpose of sustaining centralized management. The form of *ringi* is standardized and is circulated among related people in a certain order until reaching the president of the company.

Traditionally, *ringi-sho* (letter) is a decision making form that circulates upper managers to receive approval of a decision. Managers' agreements are indicated through their personal seal. *Ringi-sho*, however, used in Semicon US does not have a particular form or style. It is a free form letter or email in which managers ask something to Japan Semicon. Thus, the traditional formality of *ringi* no longer exists[25], but the word is still used to imply a direct letter that asks something important or costly to be approved from high rank personnel in Japan. One Japanese assignee explained that people use the word *ringi* as a joke or a convenient way of saying a letter that is directly sent to a high-ranking manager for approval. The word is sometimes improvised according to the significance combining an English term. For example, in one BU if a decision has to be passed as soon as possible without causing troubles and accepting further questions from Japan, they submit a "Wild Card *Ringi*." *Ringi* in Semicon US was reformed from a traditional form implying a traditional Japanese way to a more contemporary and Americanized style that signifies simplicity, convenience, and efficiency.

Efficiency vs. Inefficiency. Japanese inefficiency vs. American efficiency and Japanese meticulousness vs. American carelessness are often

[25] Japanese have begun to realize the ineffectiveness of *ringiseido* (Ono, 1960). Most of all, there was a need for swiftness. It took enormous time to circulate *ringisho* among managers, get their approvals, and eventually reach the president's hand. Secondly, a president's total responsibility needed to be minimized. Once the president approved a proposal, he (most likely in those days) or she was responsible for the decision. Furthermore, a controller system was implemented among the management staff to communicate a clear management strategy and to plan from top to bottom throughout the entire company. The decentralization of organization and the transferal of authority were emphasized. At the management level, an ambiguous relationship existed between responsibility and authority. It was difficult for top management to hold leadership because they lacked strategic planning for the organization. Some companies completely abolished the name of *ringiseido* while others still kept the system. Yet, due to the decentralization, they began minimizing *ringi* items requiring a president's approval.

pointed out as difficulties or problems; nevertheless, even these stereotyped views can be negotiated. An American specialist complained Japanese inefficiency in Semicon US, “There are so many places that company that are not efficient.” He compared American managers with Japanese managers and explained how much effort he had to make to get his job done:

> The impression I have is that American managers are goal-driven and Japanese managers are paper-driven. I don’t think that this is micro-management, but it’s terribly inefficient. If I fill out the paper, it takes a good fifteen to twenty minutes. I don’t have that kind of time in a day. I am already spending twelve hours, even on the weekend.

He elaborated on the inefficient procedure:

> If you fill out the form, it takes fifteen to twenty minutes. If you are a manager, you check it through. I spend twenty minutes on the form and email it to my manager. He spends five minutes reviewing it. Meanwhile I have to call up and talk to the customer about the form and say this is the form that we prepared for you. Basically, the customer has to spend twenty five minutes to approve this. My twenty minutes and my boss’s five minutes, which is silly.

He is mainly frustrated with his work because of ‘a lot of inefficiency’ and paperwork. He complained, “The work I do in this company, I can do in twenty hours a week in the American company or maybe less. There is so much paperwork.” This is not related to a Japanese company but to a parent company, he emphasized. He also maintained, “Certain things in the company don’t change. In American jargon, it is a sacred cow. Things you don’t change in the company. You cannot change in the company. People who work for Japan Semicon are sacred cows.” In a different department from his, a Japanese expatriate also pointed out this difference:

Kekkyoku Amerika no ii tokoro to yuunowa henkaku suru to yuukoto de, waruitokoro wa kekkoo shigoto ga zatsu nandesuyone. Zatsu tte yuuka, aru imi de araiansu ga hiroindesu kedomo, soreto yuunowa hito ga dondon irekawarushi, amari kanpekisa o tsuikyuushiteru to shigotoni naranai kara aru ittei no wakunai de areba gosa wa mitomerundesuyo… Nihon wa soojya nakute kichitto shigoto o konashite, sugoi gichigichi nandesune. Sore wa iikoto nandesukedo, hanmen kimitsusa o motomeru amari, kooritsumade nogashiteshimatte mo yokunai… Nihon dattara konna chiisana paatsu ikko ni shitemo kichitto kanri surundesukedo, kocchi dato heiki de nakunattari toka desune, kiroku o toranakattari, ukeire no toki no kazu o kazoechigaeta to yuukotode gosa to yuunoga ippai derunndesuyo. Nihon to hitoketa chigau kurai. Soosuruto sokode zaiko ga nakunareba sore o sonshitsu to shite otoshimasukara sooitta opereeshon ni yoru rafu-sa ni yoru misu toka sonshitsu tokaga hijoo ni ookindesune. Dakara nihon no hoo de sore o yoku mitokanaito. Kato ittemo nihon to onaji koto yareto ittemo muri ga aru to omounde, sokowa chotto mikiwame ga hitsuyoo nandesukedomo. Soyuukoto de nihon kara hitori chuuzaiin ga kite kanri shiteirun desukedo. Kanzen na Amerika no kaisha dattara sorede iinokamo shirenaikedo, yappari akumade nihon no kaisha demo aruwake dakara, sooyuu nihon no iitokoro wa mochikonde iku to yuunowa watashi wa iito omoundesu.

America's good aspect is revolution, but its negative aspect is sloppiness of work. I don't know if sloppiness is an appropriate word, but in a sense there is a wide allowance. Since people here change their jobs so frequently, they cannot complete their work if we pursue perfection. So, we admit some errors within a certain limit… In Japan, people perform their jobs with full attention, precision, and carefulness. They are very scrupulous. While they demand accuracy, they tend to lose efficiency, which is no good… In Japan, we keep a record of even one very small part in stock. However, here [in the US] it is lost easily. Error occurs so often because they sometimes don't keep a record or miscalculate the number of parts they receive. The error occurs about one digit higher than Japan. Then, if we don't have stock, we have to handle the missing parts as a loss. This kind of operational error or mistake is huge. Although it is impossible to ask them [employees in the US] to do the same as we do in Japan, we have to watch them. For this reason, one Japanese expatriate was sent from Japan to manage this error. If Semicon US were an American company, I think it would be ok. But this is also a Japanese company, so I think that it's good to bring in some good aspects of Japan.

Although the American specialist whom I introduced and this Japanese expatriate work in different departments, a large volume of paperwork and inefficiency are likely to result from a Japanese work habit that looks for thoroughness, accuracy, and perfection. While Japanese employees are afraid of losing information, Americans do not want to waste time over something that can be done more efficiently. This practice might reflect a more Japanese-dominant way; nonetheless, the Japanese assignee's account shows that the practice is still under construction to find the best from the two cultures.

Promotion. A negotiated cultural practice sometimes does not have a home, meaning that it cannot be identified with either of the cultures. It might have been brought out as a result of both cultures, while it is not pertinent to both cultures. For instance, some employees in Semicon tend to threaten the company, arguing that they are going to leave if their manager does not promote them. One American manager was not happy to see how some people take action to get promoted and how the company handles them:

> I think they [in a higher level] promote people too quickly. Maybe we don't hire them or interview them as well as we should. I think we have a lot of people, in my group, too, who threaten to leave [the company] and they get promoted. To me, you don't promote people that easily. But say, "OK! Bye-bye." That's what I will do. Promote people because of the job they do and what they give to the company.

In his eyes, some people are promoted regardless of their qualifications. This might a serious weakness for Semicon US. Many Japanese managers hope that American employees will stay at the company for a long time, learn about the company operations and procedures, become adept at handling business, and pass their knowledge to new employees in the future. The Japanese are reluctant to see

people leaving the company soon after they trained them for a certain period. It will take some time again to train a new employee from scratch. If no one passes the job to others, positions that the Japanese expatriates currently have will never be able to get replaced with locally hired employees.

Decision Making. The most struggle of establishing a negotiated cultural practice is seen in the area of decision making. A slower decision making on the Japan side is problematic among American employees. As described in the previous chapter, a speed of making a decision in Japan Semicon is still slow and negatively affects Semicon US. While it takes within one or two days in the US, it takes a month, two months, and sometimes six months in Japan. Many employees, especially who are waiting for answers with their customers become very frustrated with this tendency. A delay of making a decision even tends to destroy good ideas or suggestions. One American business analyst often witnessed that people who came with passion and enthusiasm to make change soon realized that it is very slow and difficult to make change:

> It's interesting to see when we hire a new person, that person might have all these great ideas and they see something that they want to change. They are very excited about, "I am going to write this letter and make suggestions."… [However] it's pain to see that over time that enthusiasm kind of dies because they understand that the things don't change that fast… It takes longer than they anticipate.

Among most of the American interviewees who displayed frustration toward this Japanese lingering decision making style, a few employees in a functional department became accustomed to this long process and showed understanding. One American manager preferred a Japanese way of making decisions compared to the American way; for the commitment to the completion of the project is

higher and he would rather feel frustrated if the project stops in the middle of progress due to thoughtless decisions:

> The way Japan Semicon looks at is [that] it takes a great deal of time before they say, "OK, we'll do this way." Once they decide on a direction, they go. I like that very much. It takes a time to make a right decision, but once they make a decision, then go and do it. Here in the US, they don't always do that. They in the US may not take time to make a decision. But, after making a decision and going to a half way, they stop and think about it again. That's very frustrating for everybody. They sit down to plan resources and plan dollars and if they get the project going, they stop. And you say, you should have planned better. I am happy with the way things are running [in Semicon US].

He also liked the way of gathering enough information and opinions from others, which would contribute to a better decision despite the time:

> I think it's good to take a little time ahead of time and listen to what everyone has to say. Then, they can make a right decision. As far as I have seen in the past, that's how it has been done and working very well. There is an old saying of US business, "Never enough time to plan it right for the first time, but always enough time to do it again." That's frustrating for people. Nobody likes that process. If I look at process and decide this is what we want to do or even decide that we can't decide right now, sometimes that is a case. Maybe you don't have enough information to make a decision. And the type of decision we make is a global network, and it should be the right decision for the first time.

The other American analyst was also aware of the necessity for spending time on making decisions because it was most likely associated with a global issue:

> I see a lot of things in six years... As I work here, I better understand it. In some cases, it takes longer to change something or implement something. That could be very difficult to implement something because it's not just Semicon US situation but it might be a global situation. So you need to contact all different companies and get everybody's approval. Sometimes it takes longer than just I want to change this or I want to change that.

Thus, the preference and understanding of a Japanese decision making style are split between people in business units and people in functional units. People in

business units handle American customers who expect quick answers and decisions, which are relevant to an American standard. Therefore, they always have to apologize the delay and explain what is going on while maintaining a positive relationship with the customer. On the other hand, people in functional units tend to see how a decision influences the Japan Semicon Group globally; accordingly, they are more likely to understand the importance of thorough examination before the final decision is made.

The American employees in business units are also frustrated with a lack of decision-making power and flexibility as I briefly mentioned in Chapter 4. A lack of decision-making power, however, arises from being a subsidiary, whether a distributor or representative. While distributors are identified with dealers based on sales consignment contracts, representatives are dealers based on sales contracts. In particular, representatives gain income through commission sales from their parent companies; whereas distributors purchase products, determine the prices, and sell them to their customers as if they were independent companies. Japan Semicon does not allow its subsidiaries to become distributors because of two reasons. One is that it has to pay more corporate tax in Japan. The other is that Japan Semicon seeks for the creation of a more integrated organization as a whole. Therefore, whenever the subsidiary needs to negotiate the price with a customer, Japan Semicon interferes and determines the price.

However, it does not mean that Japan Semicon is not aware of the frustration that people in its subsidiaries have been experiencing. One Japanese manager has been sent to a business unit in Semicon US with the mission of

establishing a high quality of business function that has the same level of responsibility as a distributor. The top level of people in the BU of the world headquarters expected improving the quality of work performance by the BU in Semicon US within the set rules. In other words, people in the subsidiary can obtain full responsibilities as long as they do not go beyond the limit which representatives are allowed. This means that while working as a representative, they have authority and decision-making power that are granted to a distributor. The manager considered that his mission was accomplished. The results have been shown in both the American employee side and the customer side. For example, the American employees' sense of responsibility and their level of incentive have risen. On the customer side, the lead-time for waiting for an answer about the negotiated price from Japan Semicon has shortened. It used to take two to three days, but since the employees at the subsidiary can negotiate the price within the limited range, they can answer back to the customer a day after or even within a day. The policy, however, has not yet been implemented in other business units.

Another area that Japan Semicon does not always control decisions is related to a subject that is impossible for the Japanese to handle or understand due to their lack of expertise, technology, and information. A good example is "E-Business" which employees in Japan Semicon did not really have an idea a few years ago. One American manager initiated this project on April 2000. He was keenly aware that "E-Business" would dominate the globalized business in which Japan Semicon has physically but not practically reached yet. He truly believed

that success of the Japan Semicon Group would depend on e-business. He said, "You need a right tool to operate the company. You cannot really use a shoe to hit a nail. You need a hammer." The right tool in his expression was Internet. American employees especially did not believe that Japan Semicon could engage in this project because it was an old traditional company, which cannot make a change. Japan Semicon has more than thirty years history with a Japanese root and it still uses *nemawashi* or slow decision making procedures. This tradition contradicts today's trend - web space, insisted the American manager. Customers, at least Americans, do not associate with slow companies anymore. Therefore, he believed that the companies which avoid the Internet tool for dealing with customers would definitely fail in the future. With an emphasis on cyberspace, he looked for long-term profitability and survivability understanding how to serve existing customers, make Japan Semicon efficient, and use technology to reduce operating cost. His vision was simple; "More efficiency, productivity, and speed." Although people in lower levels did not take his idea seriously, the top management in Japan acknowledged his idea, supported and embraced the project, and encouraged him to make it happen. He jokingly said, "I am a bad *gaijin* [foreigner]." The good part was that he was a nail that sticks out but never got hammered down[26], he claimed. This is the ideology that Japan Semicon has! One top executive told him, "Don't be Japanese. Don't beat around the bush." Some people call him "e-business czar," yet he called himself "Johnny Apple Seed" because he spread seeds for change. The e-business project was carried out

[26] This was one of Japan Semicon's cultural traits as one Japanese executive also mentioned in his roundtable discussion with young employees and empowered them to speak up their minds.

quickly with a clear intention, “Do it right and do it quickly.” The objective was straightforwardly communicated with the outside consultant. During a meeting, one of the vice presidents in Semicon US conveyed Japan Semicon’s determination to the consultant, “They [Japanese top executives in Japan] want to do it right and do it quickly.” Moreover, he passionately maintained, “This e-business will be the first time for Japan Semicon history to make the change. It is a critical path…. Let’s do it right.” The drama was about to start. Semicon US appreciated Japan Semicon that provided this opportunity to make a change. The project was completed successfully within one and a half years proving that Japan Semicon could make change with full speed.

The issue relating to decision making is negotiated between Japan and the US. This way, the Japanese-dominant decision-making style is transformed into a complex figure that integrates both cultures by being constantly addressed, adjusted, and repaired in Semicon US.

5.5. SHARED CULTURAL PRACTICES

Shared cultural practices might be the most neglected practices when two distinct cultures come together because people tend to find differences more than similarities. While negotiated cultural practices involve interactants’ active sense-making and learning in the face of difference, shared practices do not need to be questioned because interactants use similar practices. Shared cultural practices are also taken for granted in Brannen and Bird and et al’s studies since they are not identified as the main cause of problems. Rather, shared cultural practices seem to play an important role and act as common ground when people want to build a

unified culture and construct positive relationships with people from other cultures.

Sports. Sports have rules and regulations that people have to follow. To play or compete with one another, people of different cultures do not have to rely on the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds; as long as they know the rules, they can engage in games together. Sports can be effective shared cultural practices that serve to enhance a team spirit, or urge collaboration even when there are cultural and linguistic barriers. Semicon US offers a location and events in which employees can enjoy their favorite sports.

Outside of the Semicon US building, there is a place called "Rattlesnake Ridge[27]" on a small hill in which a sand volleyball court and several benches are found in the oak woods. Some employees enjoy volleyball games several evenings a week after work. Employees who love to play soccer founded a team and have a game every other Saturday. The Semicon US soccer team is comprised of several Japanese and a good number of American employees. Also, many of the Japanese assignees as well as American employees love playing golf. Some Japanese assignees, especially those who are single or who left their families behind in Japan, play golf every weekend. A couple years ago, one young Japanese employee organized a Semicon US Golf Association. He negotiated the price with a local golf club establishing a ten dollar playing fee per person, including renting a cart, after 5pm on every Friday during summer time. A total of one hundred and fifty employees including American employees participated and

[27] The name of the place came from a rumor that several rattlesnakes were seen in this area during construction.

competed with others. The company sometimes offers a golf tournament inviting some folks from Japan as well.

Benefits. The concept of benefit, furthermore, is also shared between Japanese and American culture, although the detail items of what are compensated are culturally different. Another shared practice between Japan Semicon and Semicon US is rapid promotion regardless of the employees' age. Normally, traditional Japanese companies use a seniority system, but Japan Semicon does not. It attempts to promote employees based on their skills, contributions, and proficiencies, so does Semicon US. Many young employees who are in their early thirties in Japan Semicon have titles, such as supervisor or assistant manager that conventional companies might only give to employees who are in their forties. Similarly, Semcion US as a typical American management style support this policy. For example, one American employee was promoted from an administrative assistant to a sales manager (seven times) within her 6-year employment.

Control of Manpower. Another shared but misconceived concept is the practice of layoffs. Although I explained that Japan Semicon does not have a layoff practice, a similar practice exists without using the word, *layoffs*. Reputation declares that Japanese companies do not practice layoffs, but the semiconductor industry needs to somehow adjust manpower according to the economic circumstances. The way of handling this situation is similar to the American way; hiring as many employees as possible when there is a need and discharging them when they are not needed. The difference, nonetheless, only lies

on which status workers are hired, who is dismissed. In Japan Semicon, as in other Japanese semiconductor industries, a necessary number of temporary or outsourcing employees are brought in from outside agencies. The number of the temporary employees is adjusted based on the economic climate. Due to the economic uncertainty, it is impossible for the industry to avoid this approach. Accordingly, one third of the positions in semiconductor factories are occupied with temporary workers. When the company experiences financial difficulties, it dismisses temporary employees. Although the term "layoff" is not publicly used in such a condition because it secures full-time employees and even makes the best effort to protect temporary employees' positions, it is the same practice as American's after all.

Friday. Several shared practices with a subtle emphasis on one culture are also identified. For example, every Friday is special for both Japanese and American employees because it is the end of the work week. Many employees are ready to take two days off and they look happy and laidback no matter how tired or stressful they are. "I'm glad it's Friday" is a regularly exchange phrase among the employees. Many things can be resolved and excused because it is Friday. Even if a person is overwhelmed with an extreme workload that he/she needs to complete in the next couple of weeks, he/she will be most likely encouraged or encourage oneself "Don't worry about it. It's Friday!" If the employees are taking a full-day class, they will ask a trainer, "Can you finish early because it's Friday?" Japanese can find a more American Friday spirit at the end of the week in the office. Many American employees start leaving early before 5:00pm. If they stay

late on Friday, they will be considered strange. On one Friday, I was using a computer in one department around 5 o'clock. There was only one American employee still working in the same office. One American assistant manager in a different department came in and said, "What are you people doing on Friday?" The American employee said, "I know," as if staying in the company till 5 o'clock on Friday were a peculiar tendency. In contrast, when I was leaving quite early on Friday and greeted one of the Japanese expatriates, he asked me if I was already going home. I told him, "*Kinyobi desukara* (because it's Friday)." He told me, "*Nihonjin nara, korekara desuyo* (if Japanese, you will work from now)," and explained that he would stay till 8 or 9 o'clock even on Friday, though he would work till 10:30 or 11:00 on other weekdays.

There is certainly a similar concept that indicates Friday as special in Japan. It is called *hana kin* (literally 'Flower Friday' but in an American slang 'T.G.I.F. – Thank God, it's Friday'). Even if Japanese may not stay till 12 o'clock at night, they are least likely to begin their regress before 5 o'clock or whenever their hour is over. *Hana kin* is more associated with the crowd or cheerfulness of a nightclub or bars to which many people tend to go out because they do not have to work next day. While a sense of relaxation occurs in the morning of Friday in Semicon US, excitement and relief are only seen outside of the company in Japan. The Friday spirit is shared by both Japanese and Americans, yet the early regression before 5pm is only seen in Semicon US.

Too many chiefs not enough Indians. Similar to the concept of the shared cultural practices, shared organizational problems are also found. Shared

organizational problems are seen in any organizations regardless of their national cultures. They involve individual, departmental, or structural problems. For example, I frequently encountered an expression, "Too many chiefs not enough Indians.[28]" One young American engineer described the situation as follows:

> Right behind me, my boss sits. Beside me, his boss sits. Beside him, his boss sits. I have all these bosses and only me. It's kind of intimidating. I get along with all of them, so it's not a big deal, but sitting in front of the managers and everybody is your boss; it's kind of scary sometime.

The other senior manager also explained a more complicated structure:

> I have a BU manager, my manager, line manager, and my manager in Japan, which I have no idea why. I just think that there are too many managers. We have managers in office [in the US] and managers in Japan. Those managers in Japan try to manage some people over here. I don't know how you manage from a different country. There is no way. So, I just think there are too many managers.

He has three managers in his department and one manager in Japan, even though he is a senior manager. The disadvantage of many managerial positions extends to a vagueness regarding their separate responsibilities. One American engineer said that it was difficult for all managers to determine who was really responsible to what. She illustrated her point by saying, "Too many people on the top of the ladder take charge of the situation and no one really thought of it. They are all involved and kind of talked for a minute, but they are not contributing enough to make a huge effect." Despite the large number of managers, they were not making a contribution. A Japanese technical specialist pointed out the same situation although he did not use the phrase "Too many chiefs not enough Indians":

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[28] An American movie, "Office Space," comically depicted this circumstance as well.

> *Shoojiki yuuto muda na ningen ga ooi to omoimasune. Nantoka maneejyaa toka ippai irundesuyo. Koitsu nani yatteru maneejyaa to yuunoga ippai imasu karane. Nihon mo ooindesukedo, nihon no baai wa konohito naniyaru, konohito wa naniyaru to yuunoga daitai wakaru.*
>
> Honestly speaking, there are many people who are not needed. Many people have manager titles. But, I don't know what kind of responsibilities they have. Although there are many managers in Japan also, I can tell this person does this and that person does that.

Some other Japanese expatriates also mentioned a similar situation disdaining that there were so many people who were useless, (*tsukaenai* in Japanese) and no one knew what they were doing. This phenomenon of the exceeding number of managers is seen in both Semicon US and Japan Semicon maybe because both companies try to promote employees as quickly as possible. When these companies are combined, the number of managers will also accumulate. Another reason could be an undeveloped career ladder. Semicon US, especially, is still a young company with only six years business experience. Although it promises a fast promotion for competent employees, no clear career chart is available yet.

5.6. DIFFICULTIES ACHIEVING COMMON GROUND

There is one issue that complicates work relationships – information sharing. Some employees in Semicon US often displayed frustration in the area of information disclosure. Although this issue is a common problem in any organizations, it becomes more complicated because cultural and linguistic differences might exist in a multinational company.

Concern about information disclosure and conflict associated with it seem to be prominent both within departments or organizations and between Semicon US and Japan Semicon. Different kinds of information exist on interpersonal,

departmental, organizational, and company levels; the following example is related to disclosure of interpersonal information. In one instance, a manager decided to resign from the company, but with the exception of a Japanese assignee, the only individuals informed of this decision were his subordinates and co-managers. The rest of the employees in his department did not know the manager would be leaving the company until he actually left. The delay in the release of information was at the request of the resigning manager; he had asked the general manager to not tell other employees of his resignation because he did not want to see them cry or feel sad or happy. However, one employee felt excluded from the departmental circle. The department supported the resigned employee's wish and restricted the spread of information, but in doing so, it risked relationships with other employees who were not informed.

On the departmental level, one American business analyst expressed her frustration that she was not getting information from her American managers:

> I think that people who manage people need some improvement. The company offers management training. I know a number of managers are attending the meeting. It will be effective, if they bring back some of the information and share with the group... It might be painful for them, but it might have great results. Do NOT just say 'Let's do it,' but tell us why, and tell us more. I think that'll be very effective not only going to the class and coming back, but also tell us, 'This is what we learned.' And this is what he thinks benefits the group as a whole. Through our image, other group and people work on the innovation and situation. But, I haven't seen that too much. Keep us more updated on a regular basis. Share the information and be consistent with the treatment of everyone within the group.

This individual currently does not have any regular meetings with her group members. She describes an ineffective situation that was caused by a lack of

information-sharing. For example, when one of the members supports a software package, takes a request into change, and modifies something, he or she does it without letting other people know. It is highly possible that two people are doing exactly the same task without knowing it. Two people might talk with each other over the cube wall, asking, “I think you are working on that. Is that right?” That person might say, “No.” Yet, the person sitting two cubes down who cannot hear their conversation might have already done the same thing. In the same vein, another American supervisor strongly felt that he needed information in order to inform his subordinates:

> I like to be informed and I like to pass information to my guys, because if it is important, I don’t want to take away from that. Managers know what is going on and I think it’s very important information to pass down. I don’t like working in a bottle or vacuum… There are a lot of things going on [which] we don’t know about… Tell us the big picture, [then] we can see and go from there.

‘Working in a vacuum’ was a frequently used expression in describing how stressful and frustrated people felt from a lack of information. A Japanese assistant manager was also concerned about information flow within the department. His department had a bi-weekly managers’ meeting in which only upper managers participated. He was not sure about whether the information that they discussed or decided on during the meeting was passed on to other employees subordinate to managerial positions or if the managers were bringing up the issues from their subordinates to the manager’s meeting.

Although many employees wish to be disclosed information, it seems difficult to communicate such needs and wishes to an executive member. At a BU meeting (a higher level meeting) which BU managers in all business units and

some executive members attend, a BU manager and an executive disagreed with each other concerning the release of information. During the meeting, one American manager asked a Japanese financial analyst to send him profit information via email. However, the analyst told him to retrieve the information in person since some information was confidential. Another Japanese manager looked frustrated and whispered to his American assistant manager who was sitting next to him, “They should disclose.” Then he proclaimed to the analyst that the information he could not disclose would cause problems. The analyst said, “I think so, too” implying that he would agree with him but he could do nothing about it. All information disclosure was controlled by higher ranking management. The manager explained how a lack of information would prevent positive change and an understanding of the whole picture of the company and current status. He claimed, “Disclosure is a big problem in Japan Semicon globalization.” However, a Japanese executive interrupted and said that he could not receive all information from Japan because some issues were very sensitive. The discussion about the information disclosure was ended at this point and they moved to the next item. Although the Japanese manager tried to explain a problematic situation, his appeal was turned down. In this vein, power largely resides in Japan which has all information and control who can receive what information.

As a result of insufficient information shared between business units and functional units, considerable disagreement, misunderstanding, and miscommunication exist. Some of the American employees displayed concerns

about the way the organization was structured and how it negatively influenced their work. One American assistant manager in one business unit attributed the disagreement and misunderstanding with people in functional units to a lack of knowledge about what each unit was doing and what each responsibility was. Making a guess or generalizing about other departments' ways of handling business encourages conflict and misunderstanding. For instance, under a theme called "One Japan Semicon," many projects have been carried out by functional groups to create consistency among all Japan Semicon groups worldwide. While these projects seemed to be a necessary and significant step toward globalization of the company, it was frustrating for business units because their differences were neglected. One BU manager argued that if "One Japan Semicon" meant to prepare one standardized contract for each customer, it would become problematic because each BU uses different tools and operates business differently. Contracts that each BU gives to their customers vary depending on the tools purchased and the customer's situation. One formalized contract would be almost impossible to use in his BU. This kind of disparity often occurred because functional groups tend to carry out projects which affect business units without understanding their various operations and communicating with them.

Another rift between sales in business units and functional groups is related to their conflicting goals and responsibilities. Ultimately, a functional group is responsible for customer satisfaction, whereas sales groups are responsible for profit. If these two groups are responsible for different consequences, they sometimes oppose each other (see a section 6.3.2.1.).

Although the functional group plays a very important role that the business units cannot, a sales manager in BU is concerned with functional groups' vague goal that is incongruous from her department. Currently, the price negotiation can be done by the functional group based on a relationship with the customers. If no relationship is established with new customers, the negotiation does not work. The manager showed frustration toward the functional group's approach to the customer:

> They [functional groups] have to have a clear goal. They need to know whether they are trying to get a personal account or whether they have to have a certain discount rate that they can deal with. They don't have anything right now. All they have to do is to have happy customers. They don't see the price to sell the quote. They don't see the final product on the customer... How can you make a sale when they don't have that information?

The problem occurs not only because both groups do not share information with each other, but also because they have different approaches to working with the same customers. They do not clearly communicate what they can expect from the other group. In such circumstances, they are not working under the harmonized vision of "One Japan Semicon." As a result, they send an inconsistent message to the customers.

The other complaint relating to information issue is one's limited access to information in Japan. Many American employees in Semicon US did not feel that they were getting enough information from Japanese employees in Japan. One American supervisor displayed annoyance:

> For example, when we need parts number information, it takes a while to get the information. I know why. First of all, a lot of issues are going on there [at the factory]. Second of all, they [the Japanese factory employees]

> don't have any idea how much we need this. I'm caught in the middle. I need to make them happy, but I also need to work because it's very important for the factory to dedicate the resource for us… They don't want everybody to have access to this.

Another American employee showed his frustration, stress, and burden because Japan controlled information. For example, when he asked the factory several times to send a pipe design for his customer, he did not get it. When he asked his Japanese colleague to check on the problem, the factory sent it to his colleague right away. Although some Japanese employees admit that Japanese companies tend to withhold information, others are slightly concerned about legal issues. One Japanese expatriate preferred an American way of disclosing information, but he acknowledged that American companies fundamentally protected their information under law. Since many American employees complained about the Japanese way of dealing with information, some factories in Japan started disclosing the information saying "Whatever!" However, he thinks that the Japanese should be more educated on legal issues and be careful in this regard.

Besides this perhaps 'cultural' tendency of withholding information, other reasons for not receiving information quickly can be identified. First, most of the information is written in Japanese and it takes an enormous amount of time to translate from Japanese to English, especially in the factory where not many people can speak English. A lack of gaining information due to the language is also seen in a multinational firm in Europe (Marschan-Piekari, et. al., 1999). Second, people in Japan cannot see the American side clearly; therefore, they do not understand why Americans need information that seems unimportant. In order to understand the importance of the information the Americans ask for, they

might have to read hundreds of pages. They simply do not understand why Americans want extra information in addition to what was already sent. Similarly, the Japanese do not understand how much Americans value information. For example, one American BU manager asked a Japanese factory to send some data that the customer wanted. He sent the same request in bi-weekly videoconferences. He also asked directly when he went to Japan. In addition, his Japanese assistant manager requested the same information when he went to Japan. However, no information was received for two months. According to the manager, “The Japanese think that if they apologize, it will be fine. American customers don’t need an apology, but they need data.” This might be a cultural difference in handling information, but the Japan side may not realize directly the important of the data that they consider trivial.

The third reason American employees experience difficulty receiving information is that they do not know the right person to request the information from. Japanese expatriates, who have worked for Japan Semicon or factories before coming to Semicon US, know the right person to contact for the information they want. Fourth, even if American employees know the right person to contact, that person may not be able to speak English. This could be an appropriate answer to the American employee who was frustrated with the fact that only his Japanese colleague received information. Lastly, a lack of relationship tends to delay information transmission and make it difficult to receive information. Establishing a good relationship is very important in any company. Not many people may want to disclose information to someone they do

not know well or with whom they have barely talked. One American manager said:

> If you see the factory and factory people a lot, they respond to you so quickly. If I have a problem, they respond quickly. If I don't see them for many months, their response becomes so slow... If I see them often, I will get a response right away. I know that continuous personal communication develops personal relationships…

Meeting face to face is not always possible in nationally dispersed companies, nor is it the only way to construct a relationship. Email is both accessible and convenient, and people do not worry about the time difference. However, email tends to be impersonal and does not communicate urgency or importance properly if every message contains a high priority icon. Many Japanese assignees and even American employees recommend calling the person to follow up. It is important to send email first, give the individual time to read it, and then call the person to see if he/she understands the message, making the person realize via voice how much you need the information. Through this exchange, people will also be able to establish a good interpersonal and working relationship. This also indicates that Japanese employees tend to look for closer working relationships than American employees do. The closer their work relationships, the quicker people receive information. Such relationships may not be able to be established through emails since emails tend to be impersonal. Rather, the Japanese might prefer to establish a good work relationship through face-to-face meetings because they are a more personal milieu, or at least through telephone conversations.

The problems related to information disclosure are frequently seen in other monocultural corporations. In multinational companies, however, cultural and

linguistic issues and different preferences in terms of business relationship are added on top of the normal individual, departmental, and organizational levels that monocultural or monolingual organizations have.

5.7. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5

Semicon US was established in the midst of Japan Semicon's globalization process. One of the goals for globalizing Japan Semicon was to promote both globalization and localization. With that goal in mind, Semicon US committed to create a workplace which would have both a regional (US) and Japanese flavor. This way, biculturalism was fostered in the local field. More specifically, it was required to fulfill the needs and satisfy locally hired employees, Japanese expatriates, and its parent company. Semicon US acted in complete conformity with the local rules, regulations, and events. This shows a dedication to local adaptability and relationality because the company could not operate without following the rules and being a legitimate organization in the US. Individual members of the Japanese group often try to learn, understand, and make sense of the American practices on their own terms. They might or might not participate in unfamiliar practices. Their decisions are likely to be made based on their relationships with co-workers, their willingness to experience different cultural practices, and their commitment to be ideal personnel who advance globalization. However, if a legal issue, sexual harassment in particular, is concerned, any failure to conform often results in tragic consequences. Many times, Japanese employees are on their own when it comes to understanding the issues and deciding how to behave and with whom to interact.

Management philosophy retains Japanese-dominant cultural aspects by displaying strong beliefs and maintaining a tradition of the parent company. Many American employees enjoy people-oriented environments; whereas, other practices, such as the absence of commission systems, are seen in a negative light because it is believed that they weaken American employee's motivation. This system of management might become localized in the future; but for now, the parent company is unable to give up a practice that has lasted for forty years. Bicultural practices signify the co-existence of two cultures. They are produced and reproduced by the members of the two cultural groups. Some individuals might participate in those practices, yet the practices themselves are kept in their original shapes. Negotiated cultural practices are defined as the integration and incorporation of two cultures. Sometimes they are not identified with either culture, while other times they appear to be a complex figure due to ongoing negotiation and trials of the practices. They serve to strengthen the organization because two sets of resources are available and their modifications are likely to lead more efficiency, productivity, and better practice by utilizing the best of each culture. Finally, shared cultural practices become a bridge between two cultures because of universality and camaraderie. Information sharing is one aspect regarding which it is difficult for employees to find common ground because organizational structure, incongruent goals, different linguistic backgrounds, and cultural expectations influence their information network. Under the critical mission of globalization, the local field tries to represent a bicultural workplace in which employees from Japan and the US constantly negotiate their relationships

to others, to the US, and to Japan, participate in local practices, and habitualize appropriate conducts according to the relationships. By taking advantage of two cultural resources, Semicon US attempts to find the best result for its entity and the entire Semicon Group, and happiness and satisfaction for both Japanese and American employees in order to enhance global harmony.

This chapter explored a local field, local practices, and activities in which people from different cultures engaged. Management is certainly aware of cultural difference when planning a Halloween party or a sexual harassment class, and does so in order to invite new cultural experiences and learning. On the other hand, practices such as work habits, a relaxed workplace, or job responsibilities, are more incidental, and came to exist without management control. Organizational members are active negotiators who try to make sense of other cultural practices, adjust their behavior, and look for positive aspects and values in difference. They are conscious about getting involved in a bicultural workplace, acting in conformity with other cultures, and accommodating differences while preserving one's own core values, beliefs, and habits. The value of globalization, in terms of having a clear mission to promote both localization and globalization, seems to penetrate employees' activities, and functions as way to make sense of, to learn, and to create new values, while establishing a middle ground between two distinct cultures.

Chapter 6: Face - to - Face Communication Practices

As soon as people enter a new world, they try to make sense of artifacts, people, their worldview, and ideology. They interact with others and their community and negotiate their behaviors, relations and identity with each other. Wenger (1996) calls this sense making process “claims processors” (community of practices) which make the job possible by learning, maintaining, habitualizing, inventing, mutually engaging in common activities, and reproducing their activities for newcomers. The focus is on people who act as resources, share information, experiences, and knowledge, and have fun, which promote the ability of doing work and understanding of their own experiences at work.

In this chapter, I delve into cultural negotiation at individual and interactional levels. Employees learn community of practices from each other and develop individual theories of being and doing. Habitualization of practices also reduces stress and helps people understand their work in a group.

6.1. TERMS OF ADDRESS IN SEMICON US

Organizational members learn how to say things or call each other according to shared communicative practices. It is critical to be recognized as an acceptable and respectful member of the organization. Employees learn the pattern from each other and reproduce it.

By contacting the company and having a job interview, employees learn the language that is used in the company – English; however not all the time and not perfectly. All communication and meetings between Japanese and American

employees are conducted in English. This means that Japanese expatriates must possess a basic understanding of English to conduct business. The level of English competence among the Japanese expatriates, nonetheless, varies from individual to individual.[29] In other words, some young Japanese expatriates in their early thirties might speak English more fluently than those who are in their fifties due to their experience studying abroad or to their more extensive access to English at an early age in Japan.[30] The level of proficiency in English varies among different jobs. Those who are in sales are required to have a higher proficiency than field or technical engineers, because they must deal with American customers. On the other hand, engineers have other tools to communicate with. Employees soon notice a thick Japanese accent and a lack of fluency in Japanese expatriate English.

Although English is the primary communicative language in Semicon US, when Japanese employees talk to other Japanese employees on the phone, at their desks, in the hall, or in the cafeteria, they speak Japanese. There are some American employees who can speak Japanese fluently. They often communicate with Japanese employees in Japanese unless someone who cannot understand

[29] Even though the parent company requires Japanese assignees to reach a certain level of English proficiency according to TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), which offers an objective assessment of English language proficiency, many of them have not reached this level, which requires a score of at least 600 out of a total 990 points.

[30] An effect of the globalization process is that people began to travel abroad more and more frequently, and they realized the importance of English. Studying abroad became easier due to dollar currency as compared to twenty or thirty years ago. Many children began learning English at English conversation schools before junior high school, where mandatory English classes are offered. English entertainment material, such as movies, songs, and magazines, became more available.

Japanese is involved in the conversation. Therefore, although it is less frequent than English, conversation in Japanese is frequently exchanged in the office.

One of the practices in Semicon US in terms of language is the use of English names for Japanese expatriates. Remembering and calling foreign names can be very challenging, especially when people do not share the same alphabet, pronunciation, or naming patterns. Hence, in Semicon US most of the Japanese assignees have given themselves an English name, usually starting with the same sound as their Japanese names; for example, Rick for Ryuta or Mike for Masataka. Even in the parent company, Japanese workers who have frequent contact with people in foreign subsidiaries adopt English names. The president of Japan Semicon has his English name as well. There are some Japanese employees who do not have English names. They sometimes shorten their original names to make it easier (e.g. Ken for Kenichi). A few Japanese expatriates use their last name instead of their first name because the last name is shorter and easier to pronounce than their first name. The creation of English names is common not only among Japanese assignees but also among other foreign workers, such those from China, Korea, or Vietnam. One Vietnamese employee in Semicon US was forced to change his name by the immigration officer when he received a green card. When the officer told him to change his name, he did not know what to do, so he asked the officer which name was good. The officer recommended the name James. Since then, he has used James as his name. He does not mind having and being called by an English name because not many people can pronounce his Vietnamese name correctly.

While many Americans call Japanese assignees by their English names, some employees who speak Japanese fluently, who are trying to learn the language, or who use a smattering of Japanese, call the Japanese assignees by their last name with a suffix *san* (Mr. or Ms.). For instance, they might use the name "Tsutsui *san*" to show formality, respect, politeness, social distance, a power relation, or unfamiliarity, depending on the given context. Japanese assignees rarely call each other by their English names, except for when they talk about other Japanese employees with American employees. For example, a Japanese expatriate might tell an American employee, "Go ask Mike (a Japanese accountant)" even though he would address him Hayashi-*san* (his last name) in person.

Although Japanese male assignees have English names, the Japanese female workers do not.[31] Female Japanese names are easier to pronounce and shorter, usually containing only two to three syllables, such as Rie, Mika, Masako, or Tomomi. Male names often involve three or more syllables, such as Yuichi, Kenichi, or Michitaka. Although Japanese expatriates address female workers by their last name in Japan, they address Japanese female employees in

[31] The only exception was that there used to be one Japanese middle-aged administrative assistant who had an English first name. I never knew her Japanese first name, but she had a Japanese last name since her husband was Japanese. Although I could no longer ask her reason for using her English name since she had left the company a couple of years prior, she was very different from other Japanese employees. She did not like to always have lunch with Japanese employees and was strongly opposed to the Japanese assignees' behaviors, criticizing that they were not trying to become Americans. She also believed in assimilating to American culture while preserving the positive aspects of one's Japanese background. She once told me that she wanted to reserve nice Japanese female characteristics, such as being graceful, loyal, hardworking, honest, and elegant. Although she had lived in the US for more than twenty years, she spoke English with a strong Japanese accent. However, she was very open, cheerful, frank, and outgoing and she did not hesitate to talk or interact and have lunch with employees regardless of their nationalities.

Semicon US by their first name. This is because most of the Japanese female employees in the US are married to Americans and have English surnames which are difficult to pronounce. Since some Japanese female employees are not married and have Japanese surnames and they are addressed by their first name, it might also have something to do with how they introduce themselves. Soon after I started going to the company, I realized that I was the only one who was introducing myself to the Japanese employees using my last name, "*Tsutsui desu* (I am Tsutsui)." On the other hand, Japanese female employees always introduced themselves by their first name only. When I introduced myself by my last name, the Japanese female employees, but not the Japanese expatriates, immediately asked me, "*Shita no namae wa nan desuka* (Literally, "What is your lower/bottom name?"[32] However, since our first name comes after the last name in Japan, it means, "What is your first name?"). Most of the Japanese female employees are locally hired; therefore, they might want to use a local way of addressing colleagues by showing willingness to adopt American culture and friendliness by calling each other by first name.

Some Americans try to use their limited Japanese as much as they can. Not all of the American employees do so, of course, but many of them are interested in learning Japanese. Some of them have learned words from their Japanese colleagues or taken a Japanese class inside or outside of the company. Therefore, even if American workers cannot speak Japanese, many know simple

[32] In Semicon US, I was normally called "Tsutsui-*san*" by most of the Japanese expatriates and a few Japanese assistants, "Kumi-*san*" by a few expatriates with whom became very close, most of the Japanese females, and a few American employees who can speak Japanese, and "Kumi" by the rest of the American workers.

but useful words, such as the suffix "*san*" for Mr. and Mrs. or "*Arigatoo gozaimasu*" for thank you. For example, when I was introduced to the top management, one manager introduced himself in Japanese, "*Watashi no namae wa Bob desu. Doozo yoroshiku*. (My name is Bob. Nice to meet you)." Also, one American, whom I had never met, greeted me from behind in Japanese when I was waiting for the elevator on my second day at the company, "*Ohayoo gozaimasu* (good morning)" quite fluently. I will discuss the Japanese used by American employees later.

Out of the commonly spoken Japanese words used by American employees, "*san*" is the most frequently used word. One morning a couple of days after I was officially permitted to study in the company, one American assistant whom I had just met the day before greeted me, "Kumi *san*, good morning." I was first surprised that she remembered my name, and then I was astonished to hear "*san*" after my name. In some departments, the use of "*san*" is more frequent than in other departments, most likely due to the existence of many Japanese nationals or American employees who know some words or who are interested in learning Japanese. For example, in one BU where there were approximately thirty Japanese workers including expatriates, locally hired Japanese, and three American employees who spoke fluent Japanese out of a total of a hundred employees, the use of "*san*" was prevalent among other non-Japanese speakers. In response to requests from American employees who wanted to learn Japanese, two American employees who were fluent in Japanese began offering a class twice a week during lunchtime within the department. Although not every

employee attended the class, the number of people who were interested in or motivated to learn Japanese was much higher than in the other departments which had no or only a few Japanese employees. When non-Japanese employees used "*san*," it was accompanied by the Japanese expatriate's last name, such as "Nishi-*san*," even if the expatriate had an English name. Furthermore, Japanese *shucchosha* (employees who are stationed for business for a short term), often use "Mike-*san*" or "Tom-*san*," including the suffix after the American's first name in return for the respect and politeness they receive.

The suffix "*san*" also tends to be the first word that newcomers learn in Semicon US. Even if American or other national employees do not know a single word in Japanese, they at least come to know "*san*," even though they may not use it. Usually, soon after the newcomers start working for Semicon US, they notice that some other American workers add *san* after Japanese expatriates' names. One time, a new recruiter came and asked me how she should address a Japanese manager. She was in charge of recruiting an engineer for him, whose name was Ken Yamamoto. She was calling him "Ken," yet she realized that other people were calling him "Yamamoto-*san*." I told her that he would not have minded her calling him "Ken" since this was the American way. However, after I explained when the suffix "*san*" tends to be used, especially when the individual addressed is older, she felt anxious because he was obviously older and positioned in a higher rank than she. Although I did not know Yamamoto, I did not really think that he would have minded because she was neither working for him directly nor was she Japanese. In fact, he must have understood the American way

of calling each other and he might have enjoyed the American friendliness that he does not normally experience in Japan. To note a case in point, there are Japanese managers who are not addressed with the suffix by their co-workers, but they do not mind at all. Regardless of my advice, however, the American recruiter decided to call him "Yamamoto-*san*" since everyone else did.

It is all right for American employees to call Japanese managers by their first names without *san*, but it is slightly surprising to Japanese and Americans who know Japanese addressing rules if they call them by their last name without *san*, especially when their positions are lower than the Japanese. As I stated previously, some Japanese expatriates use their last names since they are simple and sound familiar. Also, they do not mind being called by their last name without *san*; this is why they chose their last name as nickname, which means calling someone "Tsutsui" rather than "Ms. Tsutsui." People who know Japanese addressing rules may not be disturbed by Americans whose positions are at the same level or higher than the Japanese calling the Japanese assignees' by their last names without *san*. However, they might experience cognitive dissonance in a situation in which everyone is addressing a Japanese manager with *san*, but someone who is at the entry level or new calls the Japanese manager by his last name without *san*. I have encountered this type of situation several times. The following elaborates how I cognitively handled the situation within a second. First, I was thrown off by the utterance that included a Japanese superior's last name without *san*. Then, I tried to understand who was addressed, who called the name, and what the relationship between the two was like. Third, I reasoned that

it was all right for the interlocutor to address his superior in this way. Finally, I persuaded myself that this was acceptable. I once observed a meeting which about fifteen employees including Japanese expatriates and American employees attended. Right after one fairly new American technician quietly said, “I don’t know if Nishi will agree with that,” a split-second absolute silence occurred in the room. Nishi was one of the few Japanese employees who used his last name as his nickname. However, he was a sales assistant manager in the BU and many Americans and even an American assistant BU manager called him “Nishi-*san*.” In the meeting, American as well as Japanese employees were addressing Japanese managers by their English nickname or their last name with *san*. This American technician does not use *san* when addressing Japanese and it does not attract attention. However, in this occasion, her comment stood out because everyone else was using Japanese managers’ last names with *san*.

There is no obligation or requirement whatsoever that all employees learn Japanese. If American employees adjust their own speech patterns to shared repertoire of using some Japanese, however, they are likely to be considered as more enculturated members of the Semicon US group.

6.1.1. Patterned Language Use in Semicon US

Due to the presence of Japanese nationals and the relationship with the parent company in Japan, Japanese is often spoken. Other languages, mainly Spanish, are also used, although I did not study them. The company does not prohibit employees from speaking certain languages, nor does it separate them

into cultural or linguistic groups to work together.[33] Employees can freely speak their native or familiar languages unless someone who does not understand their language is involved in the conversation, which is an informal politeness.

It is easy for people to habitually speaking their own languages, assuming that no one surrounding them can understand their conversations. This causes problems. The fact that most of the Americans in the company do not speak Japanese fluently may lead Japanese employees to forget that some do understand Japanese. When I was walking in the office one day, for example, I overheard one Japanese engineer talking on the phone. He was speaking Japanese and sounded a little distressed. Assuming from where his cubical was located, engineers receive phone calls from field engineers and help shoot problems with them, he seemed to be trying to figure something out with a Japanese person. When I neared his cubical, he said, "*Doose Amerika jin no itteru kotodakara ateni naranai desuyo* (Since Americans are saying it, we cannot count on it.)" without lowering his voice. Honestly, I was surprised at his comment and quickly looked around the office. Not many people were around or seemed to care. He was facing his computer and he did not seem to care who was nearby. Nevertheless, someone might have heard and taken offense. One American employee who was fluent in Japanese told me through casual conversation that she often encountered some offensive comments made about Americans and was disgusted by them. One time, some Japanese employees were talking close to her desk and said something

[33] In the organization Day (1994) examined, management assigns groups of people categorized by ethnic labels such as "Chinese," "Poles," or "Yugoslavians," to certain jobs. One reasoning for organizing ethnically homogeneous teams, from a management viewpoint, is that workers can get along with each other without language problems and can help each other with work-related assignments, such as translating into or from Swedish.

like, "*Amerikajin wa baka* (Americans stupid)." Although they were not specifically talking about her, they were talking about Americans as general and she was American. This conversation eventually forced her to leave that place because she could not stand listening to them.

Most of the Americans and other ethnic employees cannot speak Japanese. Although some of them are taking Japanese classes, it will take some time to understand casual conversation conducted in Japanese. Even though many do not understand Japanese, they become sensitive and sometimes vulnerable especially when they hear their names in Japanese conversation. One of the tricks that Japanese employees use in their Japanese conversations is to not refer to American employees by their names if they are working close to them. This is not because they are necessarily saying bad things about them but because they do not want to create a defensive environment for them. When Japanese point out a particular person without addressing him/her by name, they refer to the location where he/she is, how he/she looks like, or the clothes that he/she is wearing. For example, a Japanese employee might indicate a targeted person with, "*Ushiro ni iru hito* (the person behind you)," "*Sokoniiru Kuma-san mitai na hito* (that person who looks like Mr. Bear[34]," or "*Sokono akai fuku kiteru hito* (that person who is wearing in red)." However, this does not happen only among Japanese employees. People who speak English can use the indefinite *he* or *she* without specifying a person's name in order to hide whom they are talking about.

[34] A nuance of "Kuma-*san* (Mr. Bear)" is somewhat different from "Kuma (Bear)" which drops a Mr. "Kuma mitai na hito (a person like a bear)" conveys a big figure like a bear. On the other hand, "Kuma-*san* (Mr. Bear)" communicates loving, gentle characteristics that a bear has in addition to his big body.

Habitually speaking Japanese violates politeness I have previously mentioned: not speaking Japanese if someone who cannot understand it is involved in the meetings. Two bipolar opinions are identified when Japanese is spoken in a meeting that Americans attend. One group (Group A) contains people who do not mind hearing Japanese during a meeting, although most of them want to know afterwards what the Japanese have talked about. In other words, Group A does not object to the Japanese language being spoken in meetings because they (Americans) appreciate Japanese effort to speak English for them. People in the group rather claim that Japanese employees should speak their first language if they can communicate with each other effectively. Another group (Group B), in contrast, says that they are bothered by the fact that Japanese employees speak Japanese in front of them. This group considers this rude, insensitive, and secretive. Although Japanese employees usually translate what they have talked about into English, Group B complains that the Japanese employees do not tell them everything. The following anecdote illustrates a situation in which Japanese language is spoken in a meeting: During a meeting, Japanese employees begin speaking Japanese among themselves. They converse for fifteen minutes. Then they translate what they have discussed into English in only a few sentences. According to a Japanese employee who often voluntarily helps translate in meetings, during the fifteen-minute discussion in Japanese, the Japanese employees are talking about something that is not worth translating into English. For example, a conversation might go like:

Japanese A: *Doo omoimasu ka.*
What do you think about this?

Japanese B: *Nhhhn chotto muzukashiinaa.*
Well, it's a little bit difficult.
Japanese A: *Soo desunee.*
I think so, too.
Japanese C: *Kore wo koo shitara doo desuka*. (pointing at a drawing)
How about we do it like this.
Japanese B: *Sorewa chotto murideshoo*.
That's a bit impossible.
Japanese A: *Huuun muzukashiinaa*.
Ahh, difficult.

This sort of dialogue seems to continue for fifteen minutes before solving the problem. Therefore, rather than translating the dialogue word for word, the Japanese translator is likely to choose only crucial parts, the final solution or decision and translate them in a few sentences. He also thinks that word for word translations might confuse the American employees. Similarly, when there is no translator, Japanese attendees only report their final decisions or thoughts because they find it difficult to translate everything they uttered for the previous fifteen minutes.

The loss of information during translation from one language to another was also seen in a meeting in which two American employees and one Japanese employee, who could not speak English well, were in attendance. There was a third American employee who was helping translate. During the meeting, the two American employees began discussing separate or unrelated issues. The Japanese employee asked the American translator through eye contact what the two Americans were talking about. The translator could not translate their conversations because the two Americans did not stop. Also, he did not translate because their talk was not related to the meeting. After the two Americans'

conversation was over, the translator told the Japanese that their talk had not been related to the issue that the attendees were previously discussing.

Based on the anecdote and my observation in the meeting, talk that is not very important or related is not likely to be translated. However, a major problem might be that the company does not employ simultaneous translators to make sure that everyone is a part of the talk at all times. Employees in Semicon US tend to ask someone who can speak both Japanese and English in their department to help translate. Therefore, he or she is not trained as a simultaneous translator or as an interpreter. The person has his/her own job, and on top of that, he/she helps translate for their colleagues. An advantage is that the person is likely to be familiar with the topic, issues, or terminologies being discussed in the meeting since he/she works in the same department. However, the person does not have the skills to simultaneously translate discussions into two languages. Also, the dilemma for the company is that even if a simultaneous translator is hired, there is no guarantee that the translator will be able to understand and translate a variety of topics, from technical issues to policies, projects, and management discussed in this semiconductor company's meetings. Indeed, bilingual employees usually need a great deal of commitment and energy to play the role of an interpreter. True interpreters "speak on behalf of others, interpret among them, re-express the original speakers' ideas and the manner of expressing them as accurately as possible and without significant omissions, and not mix them up with their own ideas and expressions" (Harris, 1990, p. 118). The role of interpreter is not only just translating everything, but it involves active interactions by understanding the

semantic and pragmatic content of discourse and social organizations and becoming a relayer, coordinator, and mediator to promote joint achievement of understanding (Wadensjö, 1992, 1998). Interpreting in the company is haphazard. One consequence is American employees do not know what to expect and what is expected of them. They sometimes feel left out, sometimes they feel that they are imposed on, and sometimes they are frustrated. In contrast, Japanese employees feel that they have to understand English.

Even though both Group A and Group B exist in Semicon US, more employees take the position of Group A than Group B. Also, those who belong to Group B tend not to directly confront Japanese employees and ask them to speak English. As a result, Japanese assignees tend to develop the habit of speaking in Japanese in the presence of American employees during meetings. The following letter was sent to HR from an American employee when HR announced an intercultural communication workshop for employees:

> I hope that in this class we cover ground on how bad/rude it is to run side discussions and overall discussions in a language that others present do not speak (i.e. Japanese in US). We all understand that this is a Japanese company but I have seen several cases in the field where folks from the mother ship have really come pretty close to insulting the customer by this behavior. There is an appropriate way to handle this (i.e. politely ask if this is OK. 99.9% of the time the customer is OK). In other cases employees run a side bar and are discussing other things that do not apply to getting into more detail on a specific question and are inappropriate (i.e. should we answer this person or not at this meeting?). In some cases the customer has people who do not look fluent in Japanese BUT ARE. The last part comes into general social issues. I have gone to entire dinners where the folks from our factory speak only Japanese and others speak English. This is not exactly a good way to build a global team. This breaks down the ability of the employees in the US team to feel part of a larger team. Unless we make Japanese language training compulsory in Semicon US, we need to try to curb some of these bad behaviors. Other ex-pat

> company's go thru extensive training to sensitize overseas assignee's to this type of behavior.[35]

This letter demonstrates roughly three issues relating to the habit of speaking Japanese by Japanese assignees. First, this habit insults customers. The writer provides an easy but important technique of resolving tension, which is to simply ask the customer whether or not it is acceptable for *shucchoosha* or any Japanese to speak Japanese. Then, the author addresses a tendency to discuss inappropriate subjects on the side, assuming that the customer does not understand Japanese well.

The last concern that the writer points out is the impossibility of establishing a global team with the persistence of this Japanese speaking habit, as he calls it "general social issues." More specifically, he explains, "I have gone to entire dinners where the folks from our factory speak only Japanese and others speak English." This seems to be a difference in terms of the goal of having dinner or lunch with co-workers. American employees tend to expect to get to know other nationals better as an extension of their work time. On the other hand, Japanese employees are likely to relax with their co-workers. Thus, the comfortableness of eating with one's own group, say national groups, may lead to segregation. Once I conducted a training session in a renowned hotel where I was invited to eat lunch with other employees. I arrived at the hotel dining room late. When I arrived, I saw a group of Japanese employees and a group of American employees sitting at two different round tables. I went to the table with Japanese employees and asked them to join the other table with me. A Japanese manager

[35] No editing or emphasis was added from me. I only changed the name of the company.

told me smiling that he worked with them everyday; therefore, there was nothing to talk about. Further, he said that he was tired of speaking English. I tried to persuade them a few times, but I gave up because I also understood the Japanese assignees' feeling as a non-native speaker. I went through the similar experience when I was not a fluent English speaker. I had to devote my 100 % of energy and concentration in trying to understand what others were saying in English and translating my opinions and questions from Japanese to English. Eventually, I did not remember what I ate and whether food was delicious. Several other Japanese assignees also told me that they wanted to relax at least when they ate food. To relax, it might be important to speak Japanese and listen to Japanese. Yet, it is also important to eat without caring about others. Some Japanese assignees hardly talk with each other while eating. They might exchange a few words, but most of the time they just eat. Sharing silence is an important element in relaxing. From American employees' perspective, however, Japanese might be seen as reluctant to join the conversation with Americans or interact with them.

The level of English fluency also determines a Japanese assignee's interaction with other employees. One young Japanese engineer loved American music, enjoyed working in the US, and identified himself as a Semicon US's employee. However, he was not a fluent English speaker. He could communicate with his American colleagues at work because he had experience in engineering and was familiar with the technical situation. Common terminologies and technical words help him understand what is being discussed in English, which makes the job more interesting. As Hanks (1996) maintains, as long as people

understand what is going on moment-by-moment, they can communicate with each other. In contrast with work-related conversations, he had a difficult time communicating with English speakers in activities unrelated to work, such as parties or happy hour; this point was also mentioned by other Japanese assignees. The main cause is context-free conversations. While talks at work are purposeful and restrained, talks outside of work are free-flow. People converse about many things and change from one topic to another. Japanese assignees, especially those whose English ability is low, can rely on neither context nor technical words. They can barely keep up with such fast-paced casual conversations. As a result, many Japanese assignees feel reluctant to join such gatherings because anxiety tends to increase. To understand conversations unrelated to work, considerable English ability might be required unless English speakers take time to explain and recognize non-native speakers' difficulty. Returning to the letter excerpted above, the writer's description, "I have gone to entire dinners where the folks from our factory speak only Japanese and others speak English," is frequently seen on other occasions which are often created due to one's comfortableness, familiarity, and language ability.

The writer proposes that this trend not only prevents the establishing of a global team but also makes people in the US feel unimportant and excluded from it: "This is not exactly a good way to build a global team. This breaks down the ability of the employees in the US team to feel part of a larger team." His claim should be taken seriously since Japan Semicon strives to be a global company. If anyone from its subsidiaries feels excluded and cannot perform to his/her best

ability due to such behaviors, this means that the company has failed to provide an environment that draws out the employees' best intentions and performance.

The sense of impoliteness might also be affected by a locus, economical status, and the power of language. More Japanese employees speak English than Americans speak Japanese in Semicon US. It might not be so offensive for Americans to speak English around a Japanese person who does not understand English because they are located in the US. Even if they are located in Japan, speaking English around Japanese who cannot understand English might not be considered impolite because English is an official language.

Furthermore, a complex economical power relationship might influence how employees judge this separation between Japanese, English, or other language speakers. Semison US is a subsidiary, therefore, a follower of Japan Semicon, even though it has the most economical power within the Japan Semicon Group. Japan Semicon is the one which is asking the subsidiaries to work together to make the company global. Japan Semicon should be the leader and demonstrate how employees worldwide can establish a global team. From the economically strong subsidiary's standpoint, however, Japan Semicon is not playing the leader's role in individual or interactive levels. American employees might question how they can cooperate to make the company global without receiving opportunities to get to know other nationals who do not speak English with them. On the contrary, Japan has more economical power than Korea or Taiwan. Japanese expatriates, who are stationed in Korea and Taiwan, work with locally hired employees in Japanese or English because more locally hired

employees can speak Japanese or English, than there are Japanese expatriates who can speak Korean or Chinese. Nonetheless, speaking Japanese in Taiwanese and Korean subsidiaries does not mean polite. Speaking local languages by Japanese expatiates might be more appreciated by local people, even though local people's ability of speaking Japanese contributes to their career opportunities.

6.1.2. The Role of Language in Social Activities

In addition to the previous example which shows how language might influence who to eat with, language can also determine who is and is not invited to social gatherings, such as parties or outings. Certainly, personal liking or common interest becomes a critical factor, but language ability is important as well. This is more likely when a coordinator is a non-native speaker in a given country, say in the US. The coordinator tends to carefully select participants depending on their comfortableness or level of speaking her native language, say Japanese, and her non-native language, say English. It is possible to have a balanced number of language groups who can communicate; for example, five English speakers who cannot speak Japanese at all and four Japanese speakers who are fluent in English. However, it is rare to see extremely unbalanced language groups. For example, the coordinator might avoid inviting one person who cannot speak Japanese at all to the party filled with many Japanese speakers. In the same way, it is rare to have one Japanese who cannot speak English among ten English speakers. This condition might be due to the coordinator's consideration toward participants. Basically, she does not want the person to feel isolated or does not want herself or the other people to feel burdened to translate.

Being able to communicate comfortably is sometimes important unless one finds it necessary or has the passion to put oneself into an uncomfortable situation to learn a language and make new friends. As I briefly introduced in the previous chapter, all members who were invited to an evening farewell party for a Japanese employee comfortably spoke Japanese. Another case of language group membership is when one locally hired Japanese employee holds a party, called "Girls' Night." She plans this party whenever her husband goes out of town. Here, the first leading factor is gender; only females are invited. The next obvious factor is language. Since her place cannot accommodate all the people she would like to invite, she divides them into two groups and has parties two nights in a row. One group contains people who can speak Japanese, including some Americans. The other group contains people who can speak English, including a few Japanese who are very fluent in English. However language is not the second biggest determinant, after the gender, to invite to the parties, since she does not invite every Japanese or American she knows. She carefully selects people according to the constellations. Language will certainly affect socializing but it is not the only factor.

I discussed the bicultural speech pattern in the US, employees' habit of using Japanese and English, problems associated with the speaking habit, and roles of language in social activities. Language and nationality certainly influences a membership by creating a work environment, grouping and separating organizational members. For this reason, different language and nationality are often used as a cause of problems in connecting and showing

respects to cultural others. Some truths exist in reality, but not always. Other factors implicitly influence interpersonal and group relationships. It does not mean that people who have the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds all get along. Next, I will focus on discourse of being or becoming, exploring how employees tried to negotiate the meaning of individual experiences and construct their identities and understand others of the memberships in their bicultural community.

6.2. RELATING TO NATIONAL IMAGES OR STEREOTYPES

People engage in ongoing construction of their identity. Jenkins (1996) argues that social process of identity has already started before the birth. People also use stereotypes to create their character. The creation of two groups in this company (ignoring the other diversity) seems to lead people to use the stereotypes as benchmarks to characterize people.

Social categorizations and cultural assumptions between Japanese and Americans function as including and excluding cultural others. Generalized cultural characteristics are maintained, abandoned, and reproduced through many activities. Generalized characteristics (e.g., Japanese are indirect and Americans are direct) are often shared among laypersons who learned through media, cultural training, and personal experiences and have become indicators of who is and is not Japanese or American. On one hand, if you, without any experience living in a foreign country, display some characteristics that contradict generalized traits in that country, you are considered deviant or different from others. On the other hand, if you are living or have lived in a foreign country and show some traits that

are not your nationality's, you can be accepted as a person in the foreign country aside from your nationality. In the past, ancestry or ethnicity might have determined where you belong or what your identity is. Yet, now one's behaviors may decide to which country he/she belongs. Furthermore, expectations from others for behaving a certain way influence what you should be and want to be.

Pointing to a Japanese and saying, "He is not Japanese" indicates a totally different meaning in Semicon US depending on who says it. If American employees say it, they are praising his straightforwardness, humor, or some other part of his character that is not typically seen in a Japanese businessman. In his view, he is seen as American and as adapted to American culture. One Japanese manager was often questioned or teased by his American subordinates as to whether or not he is Japanese, especially when he goes home earlier than his subordinates do. Although he usually works very late like he did in Japan, he sometimes goes home early. When his subordinates ask him why he is leaving early, he tells them, "*Kyoo wa yaruki ga nai* (I don't feel like working today)" or "*Kyoo wa chooshi ga warui* (I don't feel good today.)" When he breaks the norm of staying late at work, he is not considered Japanese. His American co-worker (administrative assistant) described him in this way, "Shinji is very westernized. He is very intelligent. He has a sense of humor that makes people want to be around him. He is very nice." In her description "He is westernized," she implies that he is not like a typical Japanese businessman. She demonstrates his characteristics as being intelligent, having a sense of humor, being liked by others, and being nice. Although all of these qualities may not be categorized as

westernized, his approachability, humor, and popularity seem to disagree with the representative character of the serious Japanese businessman who often displays a '*samurai* (warrior)' face absent of emotions. On another occasion, when I asked a Japanese expatriate some questions relating to Japanese culture during the intercultural training, his American co-worker said, "Don't ask him. He is not Japanese." He was indeed joking and several interpretations can be found in this utterance. For example, the American co-worker might have been trying to help the Japanese assignee since the questions were too difficult for him to answer. However, observing interactions between these two employees, such as teasing each other or going to happy hour together, it is certain that this American implied that the Japanese assignee was different from a typical or traditional Japanese employee; he was well acculturated into American culture, and he was in a circle of Americans.

Contrary to this positive or accepted image of the westernized Japanese employee, there is a negative connotation when Japanese employees refer to other Japanese employees as Americanized or westernized. There was a young Japanese employee who was often identified as not Japanese by his manager although his nationality was Japanese. He was a perfect bilingual because he had spent his youth in the US due to his father's business. He went back to Japan, earned a degree from a Japanese university, and found a position in Japan Semicon. Although he wants to work for Semicon US as an assignee, his manager explained that it seems difficult because he lacks Japanese common sense. For the position that he wants to be in – expatriates' employee relations – he needs to

understand and empathize with Japanese assignees' feelings or difficulties that they might experience in an unfamiliar land. According to the manager, he cannot empathize with the expatriates' hardship caused by language and cultural differences. Furthermore, his inexperience working for a Japanese company without knowing '*nemawashi*' or other Japanese business practices negatively influences Semicon US. His manager described him as too outspoken, independent, and too Americanized for that position. The young Japanese employee's traits, which are usually acclaimed by Americans, are less favorably evaluated by the manager because the position requires sensitivity with what it will be like living and working in the US with poor English skills. This implies that he needs to learn how to behave like Japanese and feel for them in order to get the position that he wants.

Moreover, it is often the case that if a Japanese employee gives an unexpected answer to an addresser or his/her behavior doesn't match with typical Japanese behavior, he/she will be told, "If Japanese, you will say/do …" indicating that the person is deviant from the Japanese standard and that his/her answer or behavior is considered inappropriate, unacceptable, or atypical. For example, when a Japanese locally hired assistant tried to leave the office at 5:00 pm, a Japanese expatriate jokingly, "*Nihonjin nara korekara desuyo.* (If you're Japanese, you will work after five.)" Furthermore, if a Japanese person answered a question or behaved differently from how a Japanese addresser expected, he would say, "*Nihonjin de futsuu dattara, … yuu/suru deshoo.* (If you were Japanese and normal, you will answer/do…) " These examples illustrate that if

you are Japanese and you are told "*Nihonjin jya nai.* (You are not Japanese)," "*Amerikanaizu saretemasu nee*. (You are Americanized)," or "*Futsuu nihonjin dattara.*… (Normal Japanese will do…)" by other Japanese, your behaviors or utterances are not acceptable according to Japanese standards and are regarded negatively.

Some issues, with regard to the expectation of behaving like Japanese, are clear between Japanese managers and their Japanese administrative assistants. Most of the Japanese administrative assistants (all females) came to live in the US after they married their American husbands. Therefore, they spent many years or even worked in Japan before they came to the US. Japanese expatriates tend to look for more relaxed relationships and informality with their Japanese assistants that they cannot have with American females. When a Japanese expatriate looks for an assistant, he tends to look for how Japanese she is, in addition to language skills and administrative competence. One of the Japanese assistants claimed that she was hired by her manager because she had worked in Japan for thirteen years and she was more Japanese than American. Being Japanese in Semicon US likely provides some Japanese expatriates with a relaxed attitude which facilitates a Japanese workplace in the US without paying too much attention to sexual harassment or litigation. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, one Japanese expatriate tried to avoid interactions with American female employees because he was afraid of being sued for sexual harassment. However, he does not feel the same way with his assistant because she is Japanese. He assumes that even if he made comments that would not be considered appropriate in an American

workplace, his assistant would understand him because she was Japanese. As a matter of fact, a few Japanese assistants remarked that if some of the Japanese expatriates made the same comments to, asked personal questions of, or behaved with American female employees as they do with their Japanese assistants, they would be in trouble. However, the Japanese assistants will not take action because Japanese expatriates' behaviors and comments are common and acceptable in Japanese society. Therefore, they feel that they should understand and be more tolerant with the assignees' behavior as ordinary Japanese.

Another complaint from some Japanese assistants regards how much Japanese expatriates depend on them just because they are Japanese. Most of the Japanese expatriates are assigned to the US without prior experience living in a foreign country. They have no clue whatsoever as to how to arrange for telephone and utility services or how to open a bank account, so they ask for help from Japanese assistants, who are willing to help foreigners during their first few months in the US. However, some Japanese assignees do not stop asking small personal favors unrelated to work, such as changing long distance telephone companies, making a dentist appointment, or writing a personal check for household bills, even after six months, a year, or two years. While some assistants do not mind being asked these favors, others feel disadvantaged. They observe that these expatriates do not ask personal favors from American assistants because they know that American assistants will not perform a job that is not on their job description. Instead, they ask Japanese assistants who tend not to question their job description and do whatever they are asked. Some Japanese expatriates

become habitualized to this assistance and have forgotten how to solve their personal issues outside of work by themselves. One Japanese executive hopes that the Japanese assistants will help expatriates whenever they can without them hindering their work. In contrast, another Japanese expatriate, who did everything by himself because he did not have an assistant, problematized this tendency stating that no one could gain confidence living in a foreign country without engaging such personal issues. As I said, the assistants are more than willing to help new expatriates and some do not mind doing their personal favors, yet most of them do not want the expatriates to consider this as part of their job. It is assumed that the Japanese assistant should understand how hard it is to live in the US and should not question their job description.

The Japanese female assistants' sense-making of the expatriates' behavior and questioning is biculturally processed because they understand both American and Japanese points of view. The Japanese assistants can demonstrate, "Here is America. This is how I should be treated." But, they do not, maybe because they feel that they owe their jobs partly to their willingness or ability to go the Japanese way. The Japanese assistants might also want to avoid conflict and maintain a good relationship with their Japanese managers as long as they can handle and tolerate their managers' comments and behaviors.

To avoid generalization of the Japanese expatriates, not all assignees expect Japanese assistants to behave like conventional Japanese. Some are well accustomed to an American workplace or culture and treat their assistants respectfully whether they are Japanese or Americans, although slight differences

might be seen due to a language difference or familiarity with the same culture. More specifically, the expatriates might make small talk with Japanese assistants because speaking Japanese is easier for them. Or they might share Japanese news with their Japanese assistants because they know that they are interested in hearing it. However, more importantly, they respect their assistant's job description and if they have to ask for something that is not on it, they hesitantly and politely ask if it is all right for them to do it.

Being Japanese, American, or another nationality can be determined in a variety of ways. Mere nationality does not decide who you are. External world - others might decide who you are based on your character. Some people deliberately make an effort to become a certain nationality by adopting stereotypical traits. In the beginning of this chapter, I briefly mentioned one Japanese assistant who named herself with an English first name and intentionally assimilated herself into the American culture. As long as she lived in the US, she believed that she wanted to be like Americans by being open, direct, outspoken, and friendly while preserving stereotypical positive images of Japanese females, such as being graceful and hardworking. On the other hand, the other Japanese, who is in her late twenties, warily refuses to behave like Americans even if she might risk her promotion. Particular behaviors that she tries not to do are to be meddlesome (*deshabaru*), to ask something strongly (*tsuyoku yuu*), and to not apologize (*ayamaranai*). She says:

> *Amari deshabaranai yoo ni shitemasu ne. Amerika-jin tte yoku deshabaru jyanaidesuka. Amerika-jin tte jibun no hoshii monoga attara moo nandemo yuu. Arette kirai nandesuyone. Iwanakya moraenai tte yuu nomo arundesukedo. Asoko made suru? Mitai na tokoro ga arimasuyone.*

> *Watashi wa osaete masuyo. Aru koto de maa jyooshi ni ittandesukedo, demo yuutokinimo sonna sugoku tsuyoku yuunja nakute, yawaraka na iimawashi de yuu… Nihonjin wa sukoshi hikaeme na hoo ga iidesu karane. Sorewa demo iroiro bunka no iitokoro dato omoimasuyo. Watashi wa hikaeme na bubun o tamotte ikitai desu. Amerika-jin no yoo ni hito ni mono o nasuritsukete hoshii mono o moratte to yuufuu niwa narintakunai. Soreto iiwake, ayamaranai. Warukutemo zettai ayamaranaishi. 'Eetto' toka itte iiwake o yuu.*
>
> I try not to be meddlesome. Americans are very outspoken, right? If they want something, they say anything. I don't like that. Of course, if you don't say what you want, you won't get it. But, I feel they don't have to do that much. I try to hold back a little bit. I once talked with my manager about something [I want]. I spoke not formidably but using softer words… Japanese are better off being a bit modest. I think this is a good aspect of the (Japanese) culture. I want to protect that modest character. I don't want to be like Americans who get everything they want even by laying things [e.g., responsibility or faults] on somebody else. Also, their excuse. They don't apologize. They never apologize even when it's their fault. They make excuses saying, "Well…"

To many of the Japanese assistants, it appears that while American assistants are often promoted within a year, Japanese assistants are not. It seemed that five years had passed before one Japanese assistant got promoted, while a few American assistants had been promoted within the year, all in the above Japanese assistant's department. Besides the handicap that Japanese assistants are not native speakers, the Japanese assistant believes that it is her fault that she does not receive a promotion because she does not ask explicitly and forcefully for one. She thinks that Americans are more likely to be promoted quickly because they ask for what they want. However, she deliberately tries not to ask for what she wants strongly. This way, she is able to protect her image of being a modest and soft Japanese woman even though she believes that she is sacrificing her promotion.

There is another image of being American that some Japanese employees have. As the above Japanese administrative assistant's account shows, "Americans do not apologize." The issue of apology is very complicated and can be discussed on several different levels, such as nation to nation, nation to certain ethnicities, and individuals to individuals. In a situation like the workplace, some American employees claim that their tendency not to apologize comes from their managers' expectations. American managers do not look for apologies, rather they look for what the person is going to do to correct their mistakes. From the American perspective, an overt or heartfelt apology might look like insincere avoidance. A difference between a Japanese and an American apology might lie in when and how they apologize. Sugimoto (1998) illustrates cross-cultural differences in norms of apology between Japanese and Americans. Japanese tend to apologize not only for what they did wrong but also for wrongdoings of related others, such as their spouses, their adult children, or their group members. Furthermore, Japanese are expected to apologize for those related mature individuals whereas Americans are not as expected to apologize for adult individuals' misconduct because adults are considered autonomous. In this sense, Japanese might apologize more frequently than do Americans, because Japanese are expected and likely to apologize for not only their misconduct but also others'. In fact, when I told a Japanese executive manager about complaints toward some Japanese expatriates that I heard from some American employees, he apologized to me for the expatriates' unlikable conduct because they were his subordinates. It is also possible that American employees tend not to apologize for something that

their colleagues or subordinates did, while Japanese expect the Americans to apologize for them.

The manner of apology is also different between Japanese and Americans. Americans tend to value "sincere" apology, meaning an apology with purity and a lack of vicious intention, while Japanese tend to value "*sunao*" apology, an apology that implies gentleness, submissiveness, pliability, and compliancy. Although both "sincere" and "*sunao*" suggest truthfulness, "*sunao*" implies more unconditional "selfless surrender" than does "sincere." Furthermore, accounts of a situation are likely to be considered as "anti-apology markers" in Japanese apologies, which might explain another image of Americans by Japanese employees, "Americans always make excuses." Sugimoto (1998) suggests that accounts are discouraged in Japanese apologies because they go against "*sunao*," relational truthfulness, and selfless surrender. She claims:

> Accounts are seen as inconsideration for the victim's feelings about, and perception of, the offensive incident. To a Japanese, accounts are cruel rationalization with no respect for the other's feelings. Further, Japanese view accounts as the exact opposite of the unconditional selfless surrender. They typically sense the offender's attempt to maintain some control over the situation rather then to throw himself or herself at the mercy of the apologizee. This kind of act is far from "unconditional" and thus interpreted as a sign that the offender does not really trust the apologizee. (p. 266).

Therefore, Sugimoto maintains that in Japan the criteria for making acceptable accounts in apology without sounding like "excuse" or "dodge" are much more demanding than the US. In Sugimoto's empirical study (1997), even though American participants were more likely to use accounts in their apologies than Japanese participants, the Japanese used different strategies in their accounts.

Accordingly, it is highly probable that when American employees try to explain their misconduct, their accounts sound like excuses to Japanese employees.

Going back to the stereotypical images of being Japanese and American, what does it mean if Americans are categorized as Japanese? Although I rarely heard Americans point out another American and say, "He/She is (like) Japanese," I often encountered cases in which some Japanese employees referred to an American as 'Japanish[36] (*Nihonjin teki*).' If an American is characterized as being like Japanese, it has positive connotations most of the time. Unlike Americanized Japanese, being 'Japanish' does not refer to people who have lived in Japan or who like Japanese culture. Even if you have never been to Japan or you are not interested in Japanese culture, if you possess even one characteristic which can be identified with stereotypical or traditional Japanese traits and which deviates from usual American attributes, you can be considered *Nihonjin teki*. Japanese employees often describe such people, "*Ano hito wa Nihonjin teki na tokoro ga aru* (That person possesses traits that are similar to Japanese)" or "*Kare no soo yu tokoroga Nihonjin teki* (That kind of behavior in him is like Japanese)." Not an entire character but a small portion of the person evokes resemblance to Japanese. For example, in a monthly BU videoconference with Japan, how skillfully American employees can report a total of fifty to sixty pages of report to the Japanese side determines how well the Japanese employees understand the proceedings and how long the meeting lasts. One Japanese assistant manager in Semicon US tries to keep the time and closely watches how each American

[36] I made up the word "Japanish" for '*Nihonjin teki*' or *like Japanese* as possessing Japanese traits. "Japanish" is totally different from "Japanized," which contains negative images and is often used for taking over foreign ways of doing business.

employee provides a report. In this meeting, it becomes obvious who is good at reporting and who is not. According to the manager, one American employee who is good at reporting is categorized as 'Japanish' because he knows what the Japan side wants to hear, he can summarize it nicely without talking idly, and he understands when to time pauses ("*ma*") between his lines, which makes the Japanese employees feel comfortable in asking questions. On the other hand, when other American employees display a contrasting manner, they are considered as not preferable. For instance, one American employee tends to talk long with his report. The Japanese manager does not approve of his communication style because he believes that the American employee mainly concentrates on how he can prove himself by stating unnecessary thoughts or evidence when he could answer with either 'yes' or 'no.' The Japanese manager says, "*Kare wa daremo kinishinai yoo na koto daradara darada hanashimasuyone.* (He talks about things that no one cares about, on and on.)" To me, the American employee's report was very detailed and thorough and he was passionate about reporting everything he knew if his knowledge and experiences could help the Japan side. However, the time of the meeting (at night) and the time constraints he was under might contribute to his report dragging more than necessary. Furthermore, his style of reporting, which he acquired from his previous company, may be different from what the Japanese manager is looking for.

On the other hand, some American employees, who do not demonstrate the positive characters or image of Americans, are called by a negative term,

"*gure gaijin* (astray outsider/foreigner)." Although there was a derogatory phrase, "*henna gaijin* (weird outsider/foreigner)" in Japan, *gure gaijin* used in the company involves more unfavorable connotations than *henna gaijin*. A small circle of Japanese employees uses *gure gaijin* in referring to a few American employees. One Japanese manager illustrated the following: Characteristics of *gure gaijin* are receiving benefits without generating output and getting promoted using a personal connection. *Gure gaijin* uses one's strong verbal skills despite one's lack of skill or ability. Originally, it seems to be believed among Japanese employees that people in the US gain profits relative to how hard they work or to the results yielded. Compared to the Japanese society, the Japanese employees believe that the American society has established a system in which employees are evaluated fairly based on their abilities and productivity. However, in the Japanese eye, this American logic or system became nebulous in a Japanese company like Semicon US in which Japanese brought in different business customs, such as going out to have a nice dinner or drinks at a place where they can find young women. Under the circumstance in which Japanese employees cannot discuss or debate an issue sufficiently with Americans in English, some American employees, who are categorized as *gure gaijin*, tend to misunderstand what they should do to promote themselves. The Japanese manager explained that *gure gaijin* adopted Japanese customs and stopped exhibiting good aspects of being Americans or American culture. Since *gure gaijin* can speak English very well, they were thought to take advantage of their verbal dexterity as a strategy to persuade or mislead Japanese. The Japanese manager maintained this situation

was often seen in Semicon US but not in typical renowned American companies. He also argued that it was prevalent in Semicon US that some American employees would attempt to assert their presence verbally during a meeting even by stating opinions that may not be related to the discussion.

The positive image of Americans that the small group of Japanese expatriates has consists of Americans as efficient, productive, fair, professional, and capable. However, if the American employees do not display this group of American characteristics and adopt Japanese customs or habits, they are likely to be classified as *gure gaijin*. Ironically, even though the Japanese are foreigners in the US, this Japanese group calls the Americans foreigners by judging them from the Japanese standpoint. It is also a dilemma for the American employees who try to learn Japanese cultural and business practices, and comply with the Japanese way as members of the company. While some Japanese expatriates appreciate American employees' efforts to understand Japanese ways, other Japanese expatriates consider them unfavorable. The image creates very different expectations regarding how people should behave based on different perspectives.

Furthermore, one American employee deliberately chose to socialize with Japanese employees. Although he speaks only a few words in Japanese, he sits at the table with a group of Japanese speakers who cannot speak English well and eats lunch with them. He also enjoys being involved in videoconferences conducted mainly in Japanese. One time I questioned him about how he felt at a meeting in which people mostly spoke Japanese. He replied, "I absolutely loved it. It's much better than listening to English from people I don't like." Then he

illustrated how Americans and Japanese differ at work: “I don’t like Americans. They are not themselves in business. They are so fake. They have two faces. I don’t like that. Japanese are closer to real. I prefer to interact with Japanese employees although I don’t understand Japanese well.” The image that he has for the Americans is negatively constructed, while he sees the Japanese employees more positively. Such a pre-conceived image controls his association with colleagues according to their nationality. He tries not to include himself in the American group in order to present and confirm that he is not like other Americans. However, this does not mean that he can be included in the Japanese group. Although he socializes with his Japanese colleagues, he is often described as “*chotto kawatteru* (little different)”; he is neither a typical American or Japanese in the eyes of his Japanese colleagues. This is also a dilemma for people who want to join a different national group. Even if they discover negative aspects within their own national group and try to socialize with other national groups, it is often difficult to be accepted as a member because it depends on not only their aspiration but also the other national’s judgment.

As I mentioned briefly in Chapter 4, cultural interferences also influence how much power the interactants want to maintain (see 4.5). Referring back to an American employee’s story, she implied that she could give up her power in an American well-known semiconductor industry but not in a Japanese subsidiary in the US. She showed frustration due to the fact that she could not make decisions, stating “because my manager was Japanese.” She used her manager’s nationality (Japanese) to explain that the Japanese was controlling and inflexible by

perpetuating stereotypical Japanese managerial images. This cultural perception tends to neglect effects from organizational structures and system and allocate the cause of frustration or disadvantage inappropriately to cultural attributions.

In a bicultural workplace like Semicon US, employees who have adequate contacts with cultural others[37] tend to perceive differences from others of different cultural backgrounds, create images, and determine who is/isn't (like) Japanese, who is/isn't (like) American based on their behaviors, regardless of their nationalities. Furthermore, they tend to reflect their behaviors and negotiate their eligible memberships and power to fit into or separate from the generalized cultural behaviors. There is no way to know how those images are constructed because people are exposed to many sources, such as TV shows, movies, books, and informal chatting with a variety of people. Organizational members, however, influence one another, present and perform their culture based on their own and other's idealized and expected images (Goffman, 1959).

In next two sections, I will explore discourse and interactional patterns in actual intercultural situations where Japanese and Americans directly engage in to work cheerfully, meaningfully, routinely, and effectively.

[37] Many American employees in functional departments, such as finance, customer support, marketing, or information system, do not directly work with Japanese employees because they jobs are more related to regional or internal matters. Interesting phenomena in Semicon US was that those who had little contact with Japanese and who had intense contact with Japanese tend to say, "We are all the same."

6.3. BICULTURAL HUMOR IN SEMICON US

6.3.1. Humor in Intercultural Context

During my observation of a number of meetings, I encountered many mirthful interactions. Several psychological reasons can be considered to make lively interactions possible, such as employees' high motivation to work and get things done, their passion or devotion to their jobs, or their volition to have fun at work. The most prominent interactional phenomenon to identify playfulness, however, is laughter provoked by humorous remarks or jokes. Humor has been discussed in diverse areas, such as health (e.g., Fry, 1994), psychology, (e.g., Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993), interpersonal relationships (e.g., Graham, 1995), leadership styles (e.g. Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999), and organization (e.g., Collinson, 1988; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997; Kahn, 1989; Miller, 1995). Humor is one of the most interesting and unique human communication activity, which is why it is widely studied.

Humor can be defined as a type or a means of communication that recognizes incongruities in meaning or in relationship and follows by laughter or at least a smile (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993). Based on a general agreement on humor in which "certain stimuli make individuals laugh or smile with pleasure," Apte (1985) determines three elements of conceptualization of humor: (1) sources that act as potential stimuli, (2) the cognitive and intellectual activity responsible for the perception and evaluation of these sources leading to humor experience, and (3) behavioral responses that are expressed as smiling, laughter, or both (p. 13).

Humor can be distinguished into two kinds of humor; standardized and spontaneous (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993). Standardized humor can easily convey its funniness or absurdity from one context to another. Jokes often distributed to many recipients through emails or collected in books are identified as standardized. On the other hand, spontaneous humor is context sensitive, situationally dependent, and difficult to translate to other settings. Many times people would not be able to find comicalness if they were not in the situation where humor was told. Furthermore, Fine (1984) identifies three features of humor that distinguish it from "serious talk." Those features are that humor requires an immediate response from audience, humor creates a role distance for an addresser by allowing him or her to deny the implications of the humor and avoid losing face, and humor involves more meaning than what is actually said.

Due to the characteristics of humor which are accompanied by a smile or laughter, various functions have been discussed in psychological, rhetorical, interpersonal, and organizational perspectives. In psychological perspective, humor reduces hostility and tension, builds self-esteem, and maintains health (Fry, 1994; Apte, 1985; Martin, et al, 1993). A public speaker rhetorically establishes his/her identification with listeners by developing credibility and group cohesiveness, and enforces norms, and differentiates his/her groups from others (Mayer, 2000). On interpersonal level, humor reduces uncertainty and social distance in the development of relationships and constructs personal identities (Graham, 1995; Kahn, 1989). Finally, in organizational viewpoint, humor creates harmony, stability, and control, serves as an effective means to

express employees dissatisfaction, defines group membership, and avoids power struggles (Apte, 1985, Collinson, 1988; Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Baughman, 2001).

In spite of such copious functions, however, humor is often treated as a potential cause of communication breakdown in intercultural settings (Lee, 1994). Many intercultural communication trainers recommend not to use jokes, especially relating to a specific culture, with people from different cultures. This type of suggestion is offered to prevent people from experiencing failure of their humor being understood. Given the importance of humor to personal relationships and group membership, avoiding it may have serious consequences. What we should not forget in intercultural situations, however, is a shared scheme. As Hanks (1996) emphasizes, as long as people have an idea what is going on moment-by-moment, they do not necessarily need a shared culture or language to understand others. Moreover, Japanese and American share the similar concept relating to laughter. An English idiom is "laugher is the best medicine." Equivalent idioms exist in Japanese, such as "*Warai wa hyakuyaku no choo* (literally, laughter is the Master in hundreds of medicines)," or "*Warau mon niwa fuku kitaru* (Laughter brings happiness)." This shared belief exists in Semicon US and Japanese and American employees try to *jazz up* their daily and maybe monotonous work by sharing laughter together. In this section, I will analyze biculturalism in humor uttered by both Japanese and American employees in Semicon US. I will present what kinds of humor or verbal utterances, which are

all spontaneous, provoked laughter among them and discuss its effectiveness and ineffectiveness, and how they reflect biculturalism.

6.3.1.1. Culture-Specific Humor

Culture-specific humor is sometimes very difficult to understand unless interactants are brought up in that specific society. It is a fact that people sometimes find it difficult to recognize funniness or comicalness in foreign movies, comedies, or jokes that are supposed to be laughable in the original culture. Due to such nature, cross-cultural or intercultural training books often recommend people who contact others from different cultures not to use such humor. However, in the course of my observation, I heard some culture-specific humor made by American and Japanese managers. This humor appears to be very important not only to release tension but also to show understanding of other cultures.

One of the culture-specific humor examples was made by Bill, a Business Unit (BU) assistant manager, during a weekly meeting with sales managers. Bill and Laura (administrative assistant) came into the meeting room together. No one was in the room yet. Expected attendees were one American manager, Don, and two Japanese managers, Akagi and Oda. Bill said, “Japanese don’t care about time unless they have a meeting with customers. That’s what I noticed.” Then, he told a story about one of the Japanese expatriates who used to play Mahjong (Chinese gambling game) all night when he was in college. After Bill explained Mahjong very briefly to Laura who did not know about it, he said, “If we say we play Mahjong, Japanese will come on time.” Laura agreed with him with an

excited face, “Yeah!” smiling. A few minutes later, Matt came in apologizing. Oda also came but did not say anything. While Matt was asking something to Bill, Laura stood up and called Akagi on the phone. She asked, “Akagi-san, are you coming to the meeting?” She copied what Akagi said, “Oh yes!” The members waited for another few minutes. When Akagi appeared, Bill said to him, “From now on, we’ll play Mahjong every Monday at 3.” The other members and Akagi laughed.

Generally, Bill comes to meetings on time. It is not rare to see him as the first person in a meeting room. As usual, Bill came first to this weekly sales team leader meetings and waited for the others to come. The meeting was scheduled every Monday in the same conference room and all the members were supposed to be aware of it. Unless Laura sent an email for cancellation, the meeting was always held. When Bill came in the room on that day, he again saw no one. After five to six years of experience working for the company with the Japanese, he made a general statement “Japanese don’t care about time unless they have a meeting with customers. That’s what I noticed.” Even though Bill made this comment in a comical way rather than a mean or angry way, he implied two things.

One was that the Japanese workers with whom Bill works care about the customers immensely. As one of the company’s management philosophies, the employees must work toward ‘customer satisfaction.’ Providing a very good service and reliable products is a part of customer satisfaction, but being on time at the meeting is also necessary to gain trust and show sincerity to the customers.

In this respect, the Japanese workers were following the philosophy seriously. However, the other implication Bill made was that the Japanese did not consider meetings with their co-workers as important as meetings with the customers. Since the meeting is scheduled at the same time on the same day of the week in the same conference room every week, the members should work around the schedule. However, the Japanese did not seem to care so much about time.

After Bill made the statement about Japanese tardiness for meetings, he recalled a story that one of the Japanese expatriates told him about Mahjong. It was obvious that Bill found the story very interesting that people actually spent all night playing Mahjong and even skipped college classes. I cannot make a general statement, but based on my experience and knowledge, Mahjong seems to be one of the things that some of the college male students are easily addicted to and cannot stop playing once they are absorbed into the game. Relating to such Japanese male fascination over Mahjong, Bill made a joke, “If we say we play Mahjong, Japanese will come on time.” Behind his words, he wished that the Japanese members would find more interest and passion to the meeting, like they feel for Mahjong, and they would appear punctually.

Bill again used the Mahjong joke when Akagi came in late after having been called by Laura, saying “From now on, we’ll play Mahjong every Monday at 3.” On one hand, Bill tried to communicate that he would expect Akagi to come to the meeting on time. On the other hand, Bill attempted to save Akagi’s face. Akagi received a call from Laura and he was asked if he was coming to the meeting. When he realized it, it was already ten minutes past three. Akagi knew

that the other members were waiting for him. He might have felt ashamed for forgetting the meeting or felt guilty for making the other members wait whereas he knew they were all busy. Akagi rushed into the meeting room and saw four members were waiting. As soon as he entered the room, Bill said, “From now on, we’ll play Mahjong every Monday at 3,” and laughter occurred. Bill made it easy for Akagi to sit down at the table and to get involved in the meeting that was about to start. By laughing at Bill’s funny comment with the other members, Akagi’s embarrassment and guilt were suddenly lessened.

Bill’s joke concerning Mahjong is culture-specific because this game is especially enjoyed in Far East. Many people who are not familiar with Asian cultures probably do not know how much Mahjong prevails in the Asian societies. The degree of popularity of Mahjong depends on generations, regions, occupations, gender, age, communities (see Oxfeld, 1993), and countries (for example, Mahjong popularity and its reputation is very different in Japan and China). Bill learned about a part of Japanese male’s college life related to Mahjong from his Japanese colleague and made an generalization that many Japanese men like playing Mahjong and they become fairly serious about it by playing it all night. Based on his knowledge, Bill created a culture-specific joke, which was most likely funny only to Japanese males familiar with Mahjong.

By telling such a cultural-specific joke, Bill also shows his understanding of Japanese culture. He is not totally ignorant about Japanese culture. Rather, he enjoys learning about it and sharing with others, such as Laura. Notice, he says, “From now on, *we*’ll play Mahjong every Monday at 3.” Bill also put himself into

the Mahjong game and became one of the players. Thus, he created co-membership with the Japanese and groupness with the other participants.

However, the dangerous side of culture specific-humor and a notion of co-membership is excluding people who do not understand the humor. Assuming from the fact that everyone laughed, all of the members understood Bill's joke. More specifically, Oda and Akagi acknowledged Bill's humor because they came from the society where Mahjong was popular among certain groups. Laura attained some kind of idea about Mahjong from Bill's explanation and he already made a joke about it with her. The other member, Matt, who was not present when Bill told the story to Laura laughed at Bill's joke and did not question. Normally, Matt is not the type of person who is not going to ask when he has a question. He is very straightforward and honest. What it means by being honest is that he does not laugh when he does not feel that a joke is funny. Besides, since Matt had spent a year in Japan teaching English in a Japanese company, he must have known about Mahjong. Besides, even if Laura and Matt did not know about Mahjong, the word "play" could be a tip off that it was a game, so being on time to play something is better than a meeting.

The other example of culture-specific humor was made by Rick, who was an American BU manager. In one of the weekly meetings with other managers in his BU, Rick made a comment using a word, '*seppuku* (ritual suicide performed by samurai)' which is a Japanese formal term for '*hara-kiri* (literally, stomach-cutting). In this meeting, the members usually report their updates, activities, and issues that they are facing. One time, a service manager brought up an issue that

occurred at one of his customer sites. The machine that the customer bought from US Semicon was not functioning properly. The mishaps were caused by some kinds of mistakes or miscalculations made by service engineers or the factory. Apparently, all malfunctions were Semicon US's fault. Although the members tried to solve the issue, the problem was severe and difficult to fix. Rick said, "The only option is *seppuku*," and made its gesture. To be precise, Rick put both his clinched hands on top of each other, placed them on the left side of his abdomen, which illustrates penetrating a sword in his stomach, and moved his hands to the right vigorously like cutting the belly. At Rick's comment and performance, the other members laughed.

Although '*seppuku*' might be a universally known term in these days as one of the exclusive Japanese olden-time's samurai rituals, Rick pertinently utilized the word in a given context. The original action of '*seppuku*' was conducted as the worst punishment for one's crime ordered by his master. However, the meaning of '*seppuku*' has changed over time. Nowadays, the meaning in which 'a honorable death by great samurai' chosen by one's own intent to show ones dignity, bravery, responsibility, belief, faithfulness, or manliness seems to be widely understood (Yagiri, 1971). Rick's use of '*seppuku*' is applied to the modern meaning. All members in the meeting knew that they had to take responsibility for the trouble that their company caused and take care of it in a sincere attitude. However, they realized that it was difficult to solve the issue and make the customer happy again. Falling into the predicament, Rick thought of an ultimate way of showing total responsibility, loyalty, and commitment to the

customer. As an employee working for the Japanese company, he portrayed him and the members as samurai warriors who have served their master but failed to meet the expectations and found no way out, except demonstrating their faithfulness by killing themselves. Rick's comment, "The only option is *seppuku*," corresponded to the context in which the members had a close relationship with the customer and it was perfectly understood within the specific culture - a Japanese multinational company, that they were involved in.

Furthermore, Rick's comment with '*seppuku*' was comical and he was allowed to make a joke from it because he is not from the culture where '*seppuku*' had been performed. I have heard some remarks using '*seppuku*' only from people who are not from Japan. '*Seppuku*' seems to have heavier and more serious meanings for Japanese. Japan had lost too many great people from this ritual in the past or a higher rate of suicide in the Japanese society might have to do with refraining from the word. Unless Japanese describe the fact or history, many of them seem to avoid or simply do not use '*seppuku*' or 'hara-kiri' in a daily conversation nor certainly make it humorous. However, some Japanese might use '*seppuku*' to foreigners in order to make whatever they want to say easy or clear to have understood or sound funny, for it is one of the few Japanese words well known by the foreigners.

Just because '*seppuku*' might entail different degrees of seriousness between Japanese and people from other cultures, I am not opposing to the use of the word nor saying the '*seppuku*' humor is offensive. As seen in the meeting, the Japanese members also laughed at Rick's comment. By using '*seppuku*' in a

perfect timing in the relevant context, Rick showed his understanding of Japanese culture and his connection with the Japanese company. Although he was American, he was ready to take responsibility to act as a member of the Japanese company.

Another example of culture-specific humor was made by a Japanese manager, Kobayashi, who was a PLT project team leader. His humor was not national but local culture related. It was during a weekly videoconference between the Japanese and the US teams. At the end of the meeting, Kevin (US leader) asked Kobayashi how Richard, who was also a member of the project team in the US and visiting Japan in that week, did in Japan. After Kobayashi complimented that Richard worked very well with the Japanese team, he added giggling, "Richard promised me to take (me) to *Expressions* when I come there." Kevin and the US counterparts laughed at his comment. 'Expressions' is the name of the local topless bar which is fairly popular among males. Although Kobayashi's reference was sexual, no female employees were involved in the meeting. Based on what Kobayashi said, it seems like he found out about the topless bar from Richard or he had known about it, but he has never been there. His real intention about whether or not he is going with Richard was not the point. The fact that Kobayashi and Richard became closer, spent time together to talk about things beside business, and made an arrangement for future socialization in the US was more significant. In addition, by telling the other members in the US, "Richard promised me to take (me) to *Expressions* when I come there," Kobayashi showed

his willingness to know about regional spots and visit like local people. Also, whatever the reason, Kobayashi looked forward to his a next visit to US Semicon.

The last example is a story that I heard from one American manager, Peter. I was not in the situation, but he told me how he made Japanese colleagues burst into laughter. One of his Japanese colleagues told Peter about the most recent popular phrase among young people in Japan, 'Oh hah::!' Although he did not quite understand exactly what it meant, he knew it was a kind of greeting. One day Peter decided to use the word. When Peter entered the meeting room, he saw a couple of Japanese colleagues were sitting at the table. He raised his hand to the shoulder height and instead of saying, "Hi," he said "Oh hah::!!" The Japanese colleagues started to laugh so hard. Even though Peter did not know why it was so funny, he also started to laugh because it was hilarious to see his Japanese colleagues' guffaw. "Oh hah::!" is a contraction of "*Ohayoo* (good morning)," which gained public attention when one of the popular male group singers began using the word in a TV program. This contracted new word "Oh hah::!" received radical popularity and it has widely used among young people. Furthermore, it was awarded the grand prize of an annual vogue words selection in 2000 (*Gendaiyoogo no kisochishiki*, 2000). Although Peter did not have any idea about its popularity and meaning, he was flexible to adapt to the Japanese popular culture. The fact that Peter innocently used the word shows his willingness to behave like Japanese and his intimacy with the Japanese society. Peter's Japanese colleagues were surprised to see a big American man who is middle aged and cannot speak Japanese uttered the Japanese most trendy phrase in a lively manner

like Japanese teenagers or even younger people do. Peter was funny because of these incongruences of age, nationality, and style.

Cultural-specific humor is certainly risky and problematic when people do not understand specific meanings or hilariousness. The cultural-specific humor that I presented here were expressed by people who were not from the culture. Bill who used 'Mahjong,' Rick who performed '*seppuku*,' and Peter who said 'Oh hah::!' were all Americans, but they put themselves into Japanese mentality. Also, Kobayashi who mentioned a topless bar 'Expressions' showed his willingness to become involved in a local attraction. Culture-specific humor which is not related to addressers' own cultures adds more funniness for its oddness and indicates special significance as a sign of the capability to relate to others. Thus, if culture-specific humor is successfully used considering the participants, their backgrounds, and their knowledge, it has great potential to connect with others more closely by showing a speaker's passion for connecting with their cultures, willingness to learn more about them, cultural involvement, and enthusiasm to be a member of the culture other than his/her own.

6.3.1.2. Individually Targeted Jokes

When people tell jokes or humor targeting other individuals, addressers and receivers are usually within a relationship in which they are close enough to fool around or receivers would not mind being a target (Apte, 1985). Not many people will make individually targeted jokes or funny comments on the first time they meet. It might take slight or considerable time, depending on individuals or situations, to establish such close relationship or to discover one's capacity of

taking jokes or humor without being offended. In this section, I will introduce successful and unsuccessful individually targeted jokes.

Several successful jokes are made by Bill, the BU assistant manager, during one of the sales team leader meetings. Bill was following the agenda for that day. When Bill reached the section on accounts receivable, the participants looked at the sheet of paper that indicated the deadline for the payment by the customers and their status. Bill asked two Japanese sales managers, Akagi and Oda, “Did you look at this recently?” They shook their heads half smiling but diffidently. Bill said, “You guys are killing me!” and they giggled.

Bill’s words communicated that Oda and Akagi were giving him a hard time because they were not doing what they were supposed to do. The line was also a warning that they should have spent some time to look at the sheet before the meeting and been prepared for questions related to the issue. However, what was funnier with Bill’s comment was the exaggeration in, ‘killing me.’ Akagi and Oda were not literally killing Bill, of course. Yet, a phrase ‘killing me’ was simple enough for the Japanese to understand its meaning and it added funniness due to the extreme degree of human torture over a trivial event.

The other successful humor by Bill was uttered when Akagi mentioned that he was going to have eye surgery on Thursday, which was two days after the meeting. Bill asked him, “What did you promise?” Akagi responded, “Taking one day off.” Bill asked, “Can I have your computer?” Laura said, “His wife will read the computer.” Akagi said, “(My) Ear and mouth are good.” Bill laughed and told

Oda, “Tell him to take care of his eyes.” Oda asked, “Why?” Bill shouted, “Japanese are WORK WORK WORK!” and everyone laughed.

‘Japanese’ in Bill’s comment include Akagi and Oda. When Bill asked Akagi not to work after his eye surgery, Akagi insisted that even though he cannot use his eyes, he can still use his ears and mouth. Bill tried to get more support from the other colleague and asked Oda to tell Akagi to take care of his eyes. However, instead of collaborating with Bill, Oda asked “Why?” lightheartedly implying that Akagi needed to work even after the surgery. Based on Akagi and Oda’s responses, Bill made a general and typical comment aiming at them, “Japanese are WORK WORK WORK!” Bill’s comment was playful to other members as well not only because it held some truth that many Japanese expatriates worked longer hours but also because Bill tried to accentuate the truth and show Japanese had no mercy to others in terms of work, knowing that it is not true.

Both Bill’s humorous comments, “You guys are killing me!” and “Japanese are WORK WORK WORK!” were targeting two individuals, Akagi and Oda. These humorous remarks were harmless, acceptable and funny by Akagi and Oda as a result of their established relationship with Bill. Bill knew them very well after working with them for so long. Akagi and Oda also knew Bill well and they were comfortable being teased by Bill.

Furthermore, telling individually targeted jokes and humor is one of Bill’s strategies to make Akagi and Oda more visible in the meeting. If people do not know Akagi and Oda well, they might have an impression that they are very

conservative, serious, and hardheaded Japanese businessmen due to their poker faces. If no one gave attention to them in the meeting, they would fall into Japanese businessmen stereotypes; serious, shy, quiet, etc. and easily become invisible. Bill, in a sense, found ways of making them more open, expressive, and involved in the meeting by telling funny things to them and making them smile or laugh to enjoy.

Individual-targeted humor sometimes creates a destructive atmosphere if they are not directing at a right person who is comfortable accepting it upon an already established relationship. A failed humor was made by one of the Japanese participants during a BU videoconference. This meeting is usually conducted bi-weekly between US and Japan. In one meeting, two participants, one American BU manager and one Japanese supervisor, were attending in the US side. In the Japan side, about five Japanese, all males, were present. A few minutes after the meeting started, another American supervisor, Max in US Semicon, came in the room. One of the Japanese attendees, Shinto, saw him on the screen and said, "Hello Max. It's long time no see." Max said, "Yes, long time no see." Then, Shinto made a comment on Max's hair referring to receding a hair line, "You seem to get bright." Other Japanese warned him in Japanese, "*Mata soo yuu koto o yuu* (You again say such things!)." However, Max quietly said, "yes" without smiling or laughing. Shinto apologized, "I'm sorry." Max calmly said, "That's OK." Shinto tried to justify himself saying, "The other Japanese said the same thing in Japanese. Not only me." Meanwhile the other participants in the US side listened to the conversation but they did not say anything looking rather disturbed.

Obviously, Max felt offended and he did not feel like laughing at Shinto's remark. Shinto apparently failed to recognize what kinds of jokes were comfortable and acceptable to Max. Just before the videoconference started, Shinto made a comment on the Japanese supervisor's hair, Mori. Mori is a young expatriate and he had recently had a very short haircut. Shinto asked him what happened. Mori said that he wanted to have 'a summer look' before anyone did ("*Natsu wo sakidori shitakattan desu*."). Shinto laughed at his reply saying, "*Nani ittennda* (don't be silly)" and made a sexual remark. Although everyone laughed except for Mori probably because of my presence, Mori seemed to be used to receiving Shinto's quick tongue. A difference between Mori and Mark is that Mori had spent enough time with Shinto and got used to the kinds of humor he makes while Max was not used to receiving such comments from Shinto. Shinto misunderstood the relationship he has with Max and crossed the line between what is funny and what is not funny to Max.

In a sense, Shinto's comment was very straightforward and innocent. Shinto did not mean to offend or hurt Max, but he just wanted to be funny. Assuming based on the other Japanese colleague's remark, "*Mata soo yuu koto o yuu* (You again say such things!)," Shinto tends to state such unnecessary things and make matters worse. In fact, the joke that Shinto described a bald head is a quite commonly used phrase in Japan in order to be comical and invite laughter although it is not usually directly pointed to the actual person unless they were very close to each other.

What made the situation more disturbing was Shinto's justification. He immediately knew that his comment was not working to provoke laughter from Max and the other participants. Although Shinto apologized to Max right away, he did not want to be the only one to be blamed and insensitive. Thoughtlessly, Shinto added, "The other Japanese said the same thing in Japanese. Not only me," which brought Max into a more uncomfortable situation and at the same time put Shinto himself into an inescapable and irreparable position.

Comparing the examples from Bill and Shinto, the nature of their comments were different from one another. Bill's humor was not only harmless but also it made interactants closer while Shinto's humor became harmful as he created a distance from the addressee. Negative physical description especially needs to be treated cautiously. Although it will depend on individuals, some people need a great deal of capacity or patience to accept unfavorable figures of one's body. Some people may not mind being addressed by particular people, such as close friends or family, but not by others, such as colleagues or strangers. Moreover, comments on one's body have to be avoided in the United States if addressers are making them toward people who have not established a good close relationship. Otherwise, such comments tend to be considered as harassment. Also, Shinto's delivery might not have matched with the American style. In the US Americans might tease men about bolding. Yet, it seems like that the tease must overtly recognize the danger in it, or it is insulting. Those teases may have to be also followed by self-tease to make them more funny.

As seen, humor or jokes that are targeted to individuals have to be used carefully. If they are successfully addressed, they will help recognize receivers' presence, make them more expressive and open, and make a closer relationship. On the other hand, if individual targeted humor is not used upon the foundation that involves understanding of receiver's personality and a close relationship between an addresser and a receiver, it is likely to create a detrimental, awkward, and unpleasant atmosphere.

6.3.1.3. Humor and Cooperative Response: Joking Play

Sometimes, humor and jokes become more funny and hilarious because an addressee tries to play with addressor's uttered words and add extra absurdity. A receiver sometimes requires a quick wit to respond to uttered humor and collaborate with an addresser. When language barriers exist among participants, such joking play seems to be difficult. However, it is not impossible to have horseplay if the words are simple enough to be understood and the receiver is willing to be cooperative.

The first example occurred between Bill and Akagi. In one of the sales team leader meetings, Bill looked at the chart that displayed how many machines were sold to Akagi's customers, "Akagi-san, you are in good shape. Are you working out?" Bill said. Akagi proudly responded, "I know," and grinned. Bill said, "And you are modest, too." Everyone laughed.

This conversation shows that Bill was impressed with the number of the machines sold to the customers that Akagi was in charge of. Bill gave him a high regard by saying, "Akagi-san, you are in good shape." Since Bill used the phrase,

‘in good shape,’ he played on a double entendre. ‘Good shape’ can illuminate both that something, in this case Akagi’s sales, is going well and that someone has a healthy body. Although Bill’s original meaning was the first one, he purposely took the other meaning and asked, “Are you working out?” In response to Bill’s question, Akagi said, “I know,” which comically implies that he is already aware of his nice body. Akagi’s response is also funny because of the fact that he is Japanese and supposed to be humble according to a Japanese stereotype. Typical Japanese reactions could be “Oh no no no” or “I have to try more.” However, instead of being conventional Japanese, Akagi played with Bill’s statement and collaborated with Bill to continue their dialogue to make it funny. In a sense, Akagi possessed a quick wit for reacting to Bill’s humor. Usually in Japan, when people are told nice things about themselves, they are supposed to reject them. When I came to the United States, one of the things that I had to learn was to accept compliment and say ‘thank you.’ For example, when I was told ‘You look nice today,’ I used to say something like, ‘No no no. This is very old.’ However, based on how Americans respond to such flattering remarks I gradually learned appropriate responses, such as ‘Thank you. You look nice today, too.’ Even in the US, the response ‘I know’ is not socially or typically used. Thus, not only did Akagi’s remark break the Japanese stereotype but also it went beyond the typical Americanized response and revealed his smart wit.

On the other hand, Bill did not give up continuing this joke battle. Instead of just laughing at Akagi’s deliberately made arrogant attitude and ending their joking game, Bill further played with his words and stated, “And you are modest,

too.” Bill’s unmatched opinion with Akagi’s account added extra funniness and made the interaction with Akagi more interesting. This humorous dialogue between Bill and Akagi was their collaborated work of verbal play resulting from their close relationship, their intention to make their interaction more fun, and their comfortableness with each other.

Another example of humor cooperation was seen between Frank in the US and Sakamoto in Japan. They were the only participants in a monthly BU parts videoconference. After Frank reported to Sakamoto some problems that he was facing, he mentioned a pending issue from the last meeting. Frank asked Sakurai, “Are you working on it?” Sakai replied, “I’m working on it.” Frank insisted, “Please. I don’t wanna keep haunting on you.” Then, Sakamoto imitated the sound of haunting, “Ohhhh…. Ohhhh…” Frank said chuckling, “That was pretty good.”

This horseplay started when Frank asked Sakamoto, “Please. I don’t wanna keep haunting on you.” Instead of asking Sakamoto directly ‘I don’t want to keep calling you,’ ‘I don’t want to keep asking you,’ or ‘I don’t want to keep bothering you,’ Frank chose the word “haunting” to incorporate a slice of funniness in his claim and mitigated the pressure that Sakamoto might feel from Frank’s persistent request. Frank put himself into a position of a ghost who keeps reminding Sakamoto of the issue day and night. Sakamoto understood Frank’s point but decided to fool around with it a little bit more. He imagined Frank being a ghost and being beside him groaning, “Ohhh…Ohhh...” Frank also

acknowledged Sakamoto's sound effect as the ghost's voice and complimented him "That was pretty good."

The joke circulation by participants is a product of their playful and cooperative attitude toward one another. Even though the employees had linguistic differences, they were able to synthesize a joke play. The witty responses uttered by the Japanese employees were simple and short, but they contained relevant meanings and playfulness. The joking plays also show the employees' familiarity and positive work relationships. They are comfortable playing with words together and taking a short break from serious work. This way, the employees might be able to maintain and strengthen their work relationships and reduce stress by communicating that they are in the same boat – and not forgetting to have fun together.

6.3.1.4. What is Funny and What is Not

During the fieldwork, I have observed a variety of jokes and humor and also people who laugh and who do not. Of course, when people do not understand jokes or do not think that the jokes are funny, they are not likely to laugh. However, I have started to notice that some people only laugh at particular jokes.

One particular Japanese manager, Yamamoto, who is in his middle thirties, always maintains a poker face when he is sitting at the table in the meeting. He rarely laughs at other's jokes. Since he has a very limited English ability, I at first thought that he does not understand what is said. However, it seems that he laughs at humor that is related to the business world.

The first example shows that Yamamoto laughs at his Japanese BU manager, Komiya's, comment on customers' payment. One time at the BU videoconference with Japan, the participants realized that there were quite a few customers that had not paid what they owed on time. Komiya shouted in Japanese, "*Penarutiida*! (Penalty!)" Even though Bill could not speak Japanese, he understood what Komiya meant and agreed with him, "I like that idea." Then Komiya screamed, "*Toichida*! (10% interest a day)" This time, Bill could not understand his word. Only Yamamoto understood and guffawed.

Although the above humor was made in Japanese, another example shows that Yamamoto also laughed at English remarks concerning a typical Japanese organizational structure. It was during his BU's staffing meeting with HR managers. The meeting was held to explain Yamamoto's BU organization structure to HR managers. Pat, who is in the same position with Yamamoto, led the meeting. Pat first tried to show a chart indicating positions from the fist level field engineer that were drawn on the top of the sheet to supervisors that were illustrated below. When Pat put the transparency on the projector, he mistakenly placed it upside down. The screen showed supervisors' positions on the top and entry-level positions on the bottom. Bill commented on the reversed view of the chart, "This is a top-down view." Then, Yamamoto laughed loud by himself but the other HR managers did not laugh.

Just to contrast different kinds of the humor that Yamamoto laughs at and does not laugh at, I will introduce humor that was simple and understandable but Yamamoto did not react. In one of the BU monthly videoconferences with Japan,

the participants were talking about the current status of accounts receivable (which customers completed the payment and which customers did not). Bill asked Noriko on the Japan side about one particular customer, “Can you confirm if they paid?” Noriko answered, “OK. I will.” Bill also asked, “Can you also confirm if you and Ando-san are wearing black?” After a short silence, Ed said, “That’s funny.” Max followed, “Why is Miyamoto-san wearing white?” Noriko said, “I asked Miyamoto-san to sit in the middle.” Ed said, “So, you guys look like Oreo?” The other participants except Yamamoto laughed.

These instances of humor that Yamamoto felt comical were related to Japanese business. Komiya’s comment “*Toichi* (10% interest a day)” was Japanese; therefore, Yamamoto was able to understand easily. However, Bill’s comment pointing out a typical characteristic of American organization was in English, but Yamamoto understood and found it funny. It is also possible that Yamamoto finds humor that is not associated with business or the on-going discussion difficult to understand or he cannot find its meaning, its value, and its comicalness. Compared to the simple ‘Oreo’ joke that Yamamoto did not laugh at with what he laughed at, he appears to enjoy humor and jokes that are strictly related to a current issue that the participants are discussing. The “oreo” joke had nothing to do with the topic, accounts receivable, that the participants were discussing. Rather, the dialogues involving Bill, Ed, and Max was a distraction from the main discussion.

6.3.1.5. Laughter Created by Misuse of Language

Apte identifies Malapropism, the "ridiculous misuse of a word," as one type of humor that appears in language (p. 182). Although Japanese employees do not intentionally utilize Malapropism to invite laughter, their utterances sometimes happen to be comical due to their way of expressing themselves in English that is not native-like.

Misuse of language occurred in one of the videoconferences with Japan, when Ono on the Japan's side asked Don on the US side about Kitano who went to work for the US Semicon from the Japan Semicon. Ono asked Don, "Kitano went to the US Semicon about six months ago. Is he workable?" which provoked laughter. In response to Ono's question, Don guffawed and said, "I'm working with him." Ono further asked, "That means yes?" and continued, "I wonder unification… I am concerned with confliction you might have." Don again circumspectly answered, "We have too much to do. It's not US Semicon/ Japan Semicon issue. It's a global issue."

Ono's question "Is he workable?" involves a wrong way of using the word "workable" because "workable" is only used for non-humans. "Workable" means feasible, practicable, or doable. For example, plans are *workable* or I need a *workable* plan. It seems that "he/she is workable" could be used as a slang in some occasions involving sexual connotations. Ono's question was also funny because Ono used "workable" for his subordinate, Kitano, who was apparently considered as a non-collaborative employee. Ono's true concern was whether Don was being able to work with Kitano. He could have asked Don, "Can you work

with Kitano?" Instead, Ono chose a word "workable" by misinterpreting it as "being able to work" so that he could use it with a person. This might be a typical mistake that non-native speakers make.

In response to Ono's question, Don sort of avoided to answer his question with "yes" or "no." By him answering "Yes," Don would agree that "Kitano is workable." Likewise, by him answering "No," he also would mean that "Kitano is not workable." Either way, he was caught in a trap of the word "workable" even though Don knew that what Ono really asked did not contain sexual connotations. Accordingly, Don simply stated the fact, "I am working with him" without using "workable." Since Ono could not fully comprehend Don's inference, he went back to his original question and continued, "That means yes?" and tried to explicate his concerns. Again, Don avoided to use "yes" or "no" and circumvented to answer his question. He brought up a global issue that seems to have nothing to do with their relationship in order to complicate the issue and end the conversation on this topic. Don's second answer indicates that he was not comfortable talking about a work relationship with Kitano probably because it was too early for him to conclude their relationship. Furthermore, even though Don was having a problem with Kitano, he wanted to suggest Ono that it had nothing to do with their companies or Kitano's personality.

6.3.1.6. Exaggeration

People sometimes want to exaggerate their happiness, confusion, or problems. When their comments are unnecessarily exaggerated or stressed, they might provoke laughter.

One example I found occurred during a monthly videoconference when Jack was reporting some issues on each customer to a Japanese manager, Ogawa. Both the US and the Japanese sides were discussing issues referring to the same documents. In Jack's presentation, each slide demonstrated current problems and complaints from one customer. When Jack moved onto a particular customer, the participants realized that the slide did not contain many issues. The slide was almost all blank. Ogawa commented, "It's a big news for us… This information on this is very clean. It's a positively surprise" and everyone laughed. Clearly, the particular customer that the attendees were discussing had many issues in the past. There were limitless complaints and problems that they had to deal with every month. However, this month, those issues were unexpectedly few. Ogawa tried to show his reactions toward the unexpected report. He first said "It's a big news for us" expressing that the current flawless service and relationship with the customer should be treated as significant. Ogawa continued to show his impression on the slide, "This information on this is very clean," meaning that what was reported on it was simple, easy to resolve, and nothing to worry about. Finally, Ogawa emphasized his mental status, "It's a positively surprise." The sentence "It's a positively surprise" is not grammatically correct, but it certainly reflected what he really wanted to emphasize. Ogawa could not conclude his impression in a simple sentence "It's a surprise," so he added 'positively' in front of 'surprise' to describe his great deal of pleasure and joyfulness in his surprise. Among many kinds of causes resulting in surprise, he chose the word 'positively' implying that he was surprised in a good way but not in a bad way. Although Ogawa most

likely misused the word ‘positively’ instead of ‘positive’ (‘It’s a *positive* surprise’), his intention of exaggeration caught full attention from the other participants, demonstrated his best attempt in expressing his happy thought in a second language, and accumulated funniness and his lovable character.

Another example was when one Japanese manager, Nishijima, commented on one of his customers. Laughter came after when Nishijima said, “(a customer’s name) wanted everything… It’s not good for (our) health.” What Nishijima tried to say was that the customer was apparently very important to the company. However, if the employees in US Semicon strived to meet all the requests from that particular customer, not only would they suffer from the customer’s exceeded demand that requires more service or research but also they would have to sacrifice other works that might negatively affect relationships with other customers. Logically, ‘It’s not good for our health’ is used for negative consequences as a result of some harmful substances or food that are consumed in the body, for instance smoking or excessive intake of salt or hamburger. People can also influence a person or one’s mental state and one’s health. What was comical about Nishijima’s excerpt was that it exaggerated that the customer would cause ill effects to the employees’ health.

Another reason that provoked laugher could be explained in Nishijima’s emphasis on ‘health.’ He could have said, “It’s not good for us,” to make it more natural. However, he emphasized ‘health’ referring to employees’ well being psychologically and physically. Due to the significance of the customer, the employees will have a difficult time rejecting the customer’s requests. Every time

the customer asks for something that the company does not usually offer, the managers have to patiently negotiate with him without upsetting him. Such actions not only require energy, time, and persuasive skills but also wear the employees out. Clearly, Nishijima's excerpt illuminated and anticipated both mental and physical exhaustion, anxiety, and dilemma which was caught between customer satisfaction and profit. Hence, the word 'health' has a stronger impact and illustrates more severe anxiety and harm than 'us.'

Moreover, the emphasis on 'health' implies that the customer is not kind, reasonable, and helpful. The customer is the one who always gives the employees trouble and who will eventually damage their well being. Likewise, Nishijima's remark creates a dichotomy between a good person and a bad person. Portrayal of the employees, who work for the customer until they hurt themselves, makes the participants recognize the customer as an opponent, an enemy, and a bad guy. Thus, Nishijima's comment accentuates a notion that the employees are struggling to be generous, understanding, and helpful; whereas the customer is being selfish, inconsiderate, and difficult.

6.3.1.7. Directness

Direct remarks sometimes provoke laughter as well. Especially when the Japanese employees, who are supposed to be indirect or circumvent, make direct comments, they are likely to provoke laughter.

A good example is a young (early twenty's) Japanese employee's, Takei, comment on Japan Semicon. It was during a global HR meeting in which HR representatives from Japan and regional offices in the US attended. The

participants began discussing HR globalization. To start off, a Japanese HR manager asked each member to identify Japan Semicon culture and not to repeat what someone said previously. The manager asked Takei to write down the members' statements on the white easel.

Before I discuss Takei's directness, I will briefly explain what he is like again.[38] Takei is a new hired bilingual employee who spent most of his time, up to high school, in the US due to his father's business. Although he went to a university in Japan, he possesses different characteristics from *typical* Japanese businessmen. Case in point, Takei is not afraid of disagreeing with people, expressing his ideas openly, asking questions, and socializing and talking with Americans, even with those who are in the top management positions. According to one Japanese expatriate, those behaviors are not Japanese. Whenever he refers to Takei, he always adds, "*Amerika jin no Takei-kun* (Takei-kun who is American)." Takei also mentioned that he was hired by Japan Semicon because of his unique and Americanized characteristics.

Going back to the global HR discussion, each member identified Japan Semicon culture including positive and negative aspects, such as fair, global, respectful, conservative, caring, hardworking, competitive, struggling, resistant to new technology, and old-fashioned. Since the members were not allowed to repeat the previously stated comments, those who were sitting at the end of table had a difficult time finding different aspects. After everyone spoke, the Japanese HR manager asked Takei who was writing on the board, "It's your turn." Since it

[38] I talked about him in 6.2.1.who is not considered as possessing Japanese character.

was still early in the morning, Takei looked sleepy and seemed like he was in a bad mood. He abruptly said one word “Slow,” which provoked laughter in the room.

Takei’s description about Japan Semicon was actually a blind spot for the other participants. The members in US Semicon frequently complained about slow decision making in Japan Semicon. This phenomenon, complaint, or negative aspect cannot be illustrated more tersely than Takei’s word “Slow.” His blunt response was allowed due to his youth, character, difference, uniqueness, and inexperience for working in the real world. If someone else, especially an American employee, had said it, the participants would agree with him or her, but laughter would not have occurred, for the person might have been acknowledged as disrespectful to Japan Semicon. Takei also could have said it differently without being that direct since he did not have any language difficulties expressing his ideas in English. For example, for the sake of politeness or respect toward Japan Semicon, he could have uttered, “It usually takes long time to make a decision.” But, if he had said it, it would not have been him. Thus, Takei’s straightforwardness and recklessness were well illustrated in his short word “Slow” and the other members enjoyed having those characteristics in him.

6.3.1.8. Humor out of One’s Character

There are people who often tell jokes to make others laugh and people who do not. People tend to feel funnier and heart warmed especially when they hear humor from those who normally do not tell jokes.

The first example shows a charming excuse from a Japanese expatriate, Sasaki. Sasaki is an assistant of the Japanese executive member in US Semicon. He is young, quiet, and hardworking. He possesses excellent analytical skills in terms of company revenues. During a BU meeting where all BU managers and top managers gather and share their updates and issues, he discussed Sales Support Portal presenting several charts. When Sasaki finished one issue and tried to go onto the next issue, one of the Japanese expatriates, Ogawa, asked him why his BU name did not appear on the chart that he just presented. Sasaki brought the chart back on the projector and checked out Ogawa's BU. Then, he quietly said, "Due to the space *ne*" and everyone provoked a hearty laugh. Ogawa's BU was the smallest BU among six employing only four people and it has not brought very much profit into the organization. Sasaki apparently omitted Ogawa's BU in the chart without any malice. He himself did not realize that he forgot it. This is why he went back to the previous slide and made sure if Ogawa's observation was correct. When Sasaki found out that he missed including Ogawa's BU, he did not want to admit that it was his mistake openly although he was not serious. Instead of apologizing directly, Sasaki made his excuse humorous, "Due to the space *ne*." What Sasaki tried to say was that the space of the chart but not Sasaki himself did not allow him to include Ogawa's BU.

What made Sasaki's comment more comical was adding a Japanese ending particle, '*ne*,' at the end of his statement. Although it was not certain that the participants who were not familiar with Japanese language understood the function of '*ne*' at that moment, '*ne*' worked by slightly insisting on Sasaki's

reason by not making him look arrogant. If Sasaki had expressed it without '*ne*,' his statement would have conveyed a more definite and unchangeable attitude and it would not have left room for accepting other's disagreement or opposition. Such attitude would have not only made Sasaki look unfriendly and snobby but also made Ogawa more defensive. Therefore, the Japanese ending particle '*ne*' operated to mitigate Sasaki's statement carrying an impression for accepting further questions or disagreement. As a matter of fact, after Sasaki's explanation, Ogawa clarified, "So, we are applicable," in order to make sure that the space limitation but not the performance of his BU did not permit its name from appearing on the chart.

The second example was uttered by a Japanese manager, Hayashi in his late fifties to early sixties. In videoconferences, he hardly speaks up due to his limited English skills. However, since he has the greatest power, there are times when he has to answer some questions that require his permission or decision-making. In those times, what he usually says is simple yes or OK (I have never heard of him saying 'no.') A number of videoconferences ended without hearing Hayashi's voice. One day, Hayashi was not in a videoconference. At the beginning of the meeting, Masako in Japan Semicon informed US Semicon members that Hayashi would be late because of another meeting. After the participants discussed issues on accounts receivable, Masako told the US members, "Hayashi-san is here now." Since Hayashi sat at the edge of the table where the camera did not reach, no one could see him on the TV screen. Bill on the US side asked, "Where is Hayashi-san?" Hayashi extended his arm in order to

show his hand in the TV camera and said, “I was delayed.” Bill repeated Hayashi’s words, “He was delayed,” and laughed. Not only did Hayashi utter words other than ‘yes’ or ‘OK,’ but also he created a double entendre. On the accounts receivable discussion, the participants were frustrated because many customers have not paid their payment on the due date. When they described such situation, they often used a word ‘delay’; for instance, “(Customer’s name) is delayed in payment.” Hayashi took the word on this exasperating issue and used it comically for his current situation of having been late. This touch of humor created by Hayashi’s calm, shy, and quiet characteristics made the participants forget about the issue for a short while and change their negative mood into more cheerful one.

The last example was made by an American manager, Tom. Tom is about fifty years old, and he is a calm, quiet, polite, and gracious manager. During the meeting, he rarely speaks up or asks questions while others are talking. When he reports something, however, he does very well summarizing his points concisely and using simple vocabulary for the Japanese. One day during a videoconference, a BU manager in US Semicon, Kawaguchi, asked one of the Japanese employees in Japan Semicon about a reason for not coming to the annual BU global meeting in San Diego. He said, “Because I have *hooji*.” All Japanese participants chuckled at his reason. ‘*Hooji*’ means a ceremony for dead people. However, other Americans could not understand it. Kawaguchi translated it into English. Then, Tom said, “I thought he said orgy,” his face turning red. Kawaguchi and the other American attendees laughed. Since the other Japanese could not understand the

word ‘orgy,’ Kawaguchi explained, “*Rankoo paatii dayo* (It’s a sexual party).” The other Japanese were surprised to hear the meaning and giggled. ‘*Hooji*’ and ‘orgy’ surely sound alike. However, no one had expected Tom would even say such a word.

The above examples show mirthful experience derived from unusual utterances by those who do not usually tend to be funny or who do not particularly look for sources of laughter. Although everyone has a sense of humor that is slightly different from one another, humor told by those who do not normally tell funny things tends to be more interesting and refreshing for the others. Furthermore even though the nature of humor is likely determined by a person’s life experience (Fry, 1994), types of humor that individuals make are likely to be influenced by on going activities and moment by moment interactions.

All of the examples of humor which I have discussed so far were told by males. The biggest reason for this is that not many females attended the managerial meeting that I mainly observed; therefore, I could not observe their interactions as often as I did with male managers. However, no one should neglect a different side of biculturalism, not only between Japanese and Americans but also between females and males. I encountered some of the laughter resulting from a female manager’s utterances.

6.3.1.9. Humor and Gender

In one of the BU team leaders meetings, an American female sales manager, Meagan, tried to confirm with another Japanese sales manager Yamada

about the number of the systems that he was selling to one of his customers in that month. When Yamada told Meagan about the number of the machines, she asked him about how certain the number is, “Firm?” Yamada said, “I think so.” Meagan said, “You THINK so. What does THAT mean?” lowering her tone. Yamada said giggling, “I don’t know.” Meagan and Yamada have been working together for a quite while and know each other very well. Meagan, who is in her late twenties, is a capable person and was promoted to a manager very quickly. She studied in Japan for a year during college; therefore, she was familiar with Japanese culture. Even though she knows about Japanese business customs such as being respectful and polite to senior persons, she does not apply them to American business. Meagan is much younger than Yamada, but she looks for egalitarian relationships. When Yamada said, “I think so,” Meagan asked him, “You THINK so. What does THAT mean?” While she was half teasing Yamada, she also tried to teach him that his answer was too ambiguous to be accepted in this business world. In addition, Meagan implied that Yamada should be more confident with expressing his knowledge or information. Meagan was able to take such actions without offending Yamada because of the relationship she established with him and her past experience and knowledge about what she could do or say and to whom.

Although Meagan is not always humorous or she does not tell jokes, she is cooperative with others. While she laughs at other’s humor, she also plays a role of watchdog to judge if one’s banter can be understood by her Japanese colleagues. In one meeting, the participants were discussing how to prevent miscommunicating with one of the factories in Japan. Not being informed of

changes by the factory was the major issue in the discussion. Meagan asked two Japanese expatriates who were from the factory in Japan, “Could you please tell us during Monday meetings about any changes?” One of the expatriates, Yokono, said, “I will teach a sales person man-to-man,” meaning that he is going to inform changes to each sales person one-on-one. The assistant BU manager, Bill, took the phrase of “man-to-man” and teased Yokono, “How about man-to-woman?” Yokono and other participants laughed, but Yokono did not seem to understand Bill’s humor and said giggling, “Oh, sorry.” Meagan quickly observed Yokono’s reaction and knew that he might have thought that he made a mistake in his English. Then, she told Bill, “Don’t complicate things.” Accordingly, Meagan is not only alert to jokes or humor that other people make but also she tries to warn a speaker to refrain from humor or jokes that might confuse the Japanese participants. Although I cannot generalize humor used by the female employee, Meagan who is still in her late twenties might have felt self-obligation or expectation as a person who has experience living in Japan to nurture and help other Japanese as much as she is allowed under certain social restraints.

6.3.1.10. Humor Across Cultures

The section on humor cannot be completed without mentioning a Japanese executive member’s humor in the All Employee Meeting. His humor demonstrates merriness that both Japanese and American employees in Semicon US find in spite of their differences in nationalities, cultures, ethnicities, departments, ranks, and genders. On top of that, he changed the boring nature of the meeting to lively one.

The All Employee Meeting is a quarterly company-wide meeting that all employees of Semicon US are required to attend. Before Semicon US added on a new building, the meeting had been held in a ballroom at a nearby hotel because of space limitations. Until about a year ago, many employees, especially Japanese assignees, were reluctant to attend the meeting because first, they were too busy, second, it was too much to drive to the hotel, third, the meeting was boring, and fourth, they were not interested in the contents of the meeting. Even those who regularly attended the meeting felt that it was mundane, but they participated in order to have the soda and cookies that were served in the meeting.[39] In the All Employee Meeting, the president and a vice president mainly give business updates, safety and financial updates, and additional issues as they arise. Although the president always prepared several canned jokes to tell the members in the beginning and end to make the meeting more lively, the meeting was still monotonous and his jokes hardly kept everyone awake throughout the meeting. However, the nature of this All Employee Meeting turned around when a newly assigned Japanese executive manager, Noguchi, joined.

The very first All Employee Meeting in the new building was held a week after the September 11th attack. Due to the tragic happenings in the United States, the meeting was specially organized to lament the victims and their families and to reinforce unification. Copies of the US national anthem and red, white, and blue ribbons were distributed at the entrance. Two flags reading “God Bless America” and “United We Stand” were hung on the front wall. A US flag and the

[39] Soda and cookies were served in the All Employee Meeting when the company was in good financial condition. However, these treats ended at the February meeting of 2001 because the company went into recession after that.

phrase “Let Freedom Reign” were used in the background of the PowerPoint presentations. Employees came in and seated themselves quietly. At 3:30pm, the president began the meeting with a comment on the previous week’s tragedy and called several employees’ names who were stranded because of, as well as those who were safe in spite of, attending a training session a couple of blocks away from the World Trade Center. After everyone sang the national anthem, the president started discussing issues as usual. By the time the vice president finished giving the financial update and forecast, which indicated forthcoming depression, it was already 5:00pm. Noguchi, a newly assigned manager, stood up behind the podium and asked people who were standing up to look for chairs. “Because you have to stand up another one and a half hours!” said Noguchi. This released the tension in the meeting and the audience burst into laughter. Noguchi introduced himself, his title, and his job responsibility. Although he had a thick Japanese accent, the audience seemed to understand him along with his presentation aids, with the exception of when he explained that his job responsibility was like a *rescue team*, and he had difficulty pronouncing the *r*. After he tried to pronounce *rescue team* about three times, there was a momentary stir in the audience because many people could not decipher what he said. Then, the president skillfully jumped in and asked, “What’s that?” After Noguchi repeated the word several times, the president understood and said, “Oh! Rescue Team!” with his full volume. The audience finally understood what Noguchi uttered. The word *rescue team* was related to what he was going to discuss in his

next issue. His next topic created the funniest moment in the All Employee Meeting.

Noguchi was one of the employees who was stranded in Idaho due to the terrorist attack. Because all the airports were shut down and no one knew when they would be reopen, he and his colleagues decided to drive back from Idaho to Springfield, where Semicon US was located. Noguchi prepared a slide show on their thirty-five hour trip from Idaho. He started the show with a commemorative photograph with four familiar high-ranking managers, including a vice president, who were standing in front of the rental van. Noguchi called this group a rescue team. He showed photographs including an executive member driving, a wide road and vast fields in Idaho, and managers who were sleeping in the back seat. His comments on the photographs were comical and innocent. Everything he saw in Idaho was new to him because he had only been in the US a few months. For example, he said, “The land and roads are so big!”, “After a while, there was nothing to see!”, “No wonder this is a potato country!”, and “It took only three minutes to drive through the cities! I realized how big Springfield was!” The audience could not stop laughing during the entire slide show. Since this meeting, Noguchi is recognized by many employees as a charming executive manager.

The second All Employee Meeting in which Noguchi was involved was held after the second layoff in Semicon US's history. The company was experiencing the worst recession ever and employees were feeling distressed. Noguchi concentrated on discussing something positive to cheer the employees up. As soon as he attached a microphone to his suit jacket, he touched his hair and tie saying, "I try to look nice today. I didn't know I was on camera last time!" and told how someone who did not attend the last meeting asked him "You must be the one who drove back from Idaho!" In Semicon US, the All Employee Meeting is videotaped and available on the Intranet for those unable to attend the meeting. Laughter began in the audience. "He is so cute!" and "He is so funny!" were heard here and there. After he disclosed that he had prepared special slides, he showed a picture of an award presentation from one of the customers (see Illustration 6.3.1.). Noguchi was the recipient, saying "Thank you."

Illustration 6.3.1: Award Presentation 1

He said that he was very happy to have received the award, but something else was on his mind. Then Noguchi showed the next photograph (Illustration 6.3.2.).

Illustration 6.3.2: Award Presentation 2

Due to the severe economic condition, customers reduced and cancelled orders of machines from Semicon US. Therefore, Noguchi thought that he should be receiving orders rather than awards. He again said, “A different person thinks differently,” and showed the last picture (Illustration 6.3.3.), in which one of the attendees in front was thinking, “I am hungry.”

Illustration 6.3.3: Award Presentation 3

After Noguchi discussed the award presentation, he explained the globalization phases that Japan Semicon was entering. He discussed Japan Semicon as legal headquarters, but it did not mean that other important activities or decisions should not be made in any other parts of the world. Rather, they should occur in many places other than Japan, Noguchi emphasized. He then showed a picture (Illustration 6.3.4.) emphasizing: “This is a confidential picture. Don’t tell the president of Japan Semicon.” He said he believes that in the next phase of globalization, Semicon US should lead Japan Semicon headquarters. He superimposed the face of the president of Semicon US on a cowboy riding a horse and the face of the president of Japan Semicon on a *samurai* warrior, following behind. The slide showed that the president of Semicon US was pulling the president of Japan Semicon with a rope.

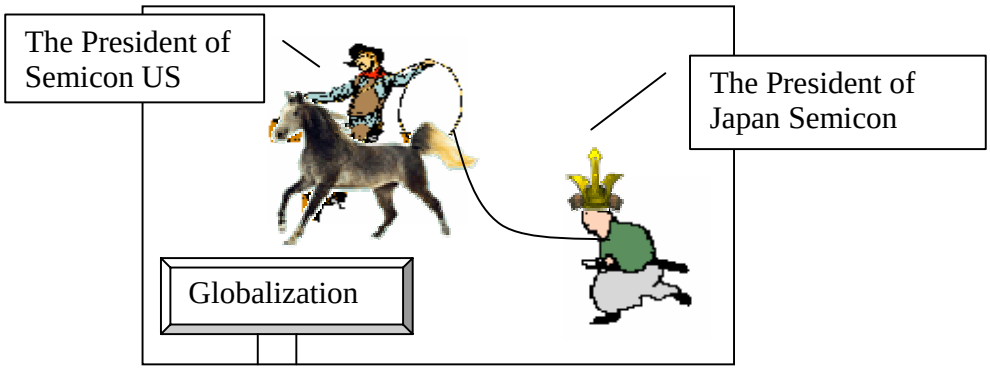


Illustration 6.3.4: Globalization

The audience found Noguchi’s presentation entertaining and amusing and laughed throughout the presentation.

It is very difficult for me to describe in this text how comical Noguchi’s presentations were, because they were situational and humorous to the members

of Semicon US, who could understand specific contexts. Compared to the president's canned jokes, which were funny but required a high level of English to be understood, Noguchi's humor was expressed visually with a personal touch, experience, and creativity. He inoffensively presented his intercultural experiences in the US and the American employees enjoyed listening to a foreigner's cultural experience. He also shared a shared membership; everyone in Semicon US is hoping that the present depression passes quickly. Even though he had a thick accent, the employees understood his utterances aided by visuals and by his energy. They enjoyed Noguchi's strenuous efforts through which he encouraged the employees to survive the difficulties together by not forgetting positive attitudes. Clearly, Noguchi's humor was recognized not by Japanese employees alone, but by all the cultures and nations represented at the meeting.

6.3.2. Humorously Constructed Bicultural Organizational Reality

Humor alone does not reveal organizational reality because people are merely joking after all. However, due to its light-hearted unserious nature, humor also allows people to openly express their emotions and thoughts. Several studies in organizations attempt to explore a linkage between humor and paradox, ambiguity, contradiction, incongruity, and incoherence (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997). As Fine (1984) argues, "humor does not by itself create meanings, but rather plays off them, using the meanings previously implicit to present a novel, if metaphorical, situational one which means both more and less than what it overtly expresses"; therefore, humor metaphorically, symbolically, and paradoxically conveys powerful messages (p. 93-94, 97). In this section, I will

analyze aforementioned humorous remarks based on the organizational level, interpret in combination with other sources, such as interviews, field notes, and company documents, and go beyond what is said on the surface.

6.3.2.1. Maintaining and Resisting Stereotypes

A widely recognized Japanese stereotype among people in the world and the employees in US Semicon is a hardworking. A fact is that most of the Japanese expatriates in US Semicon stay in the company until late at night, like 9 or 10pm which is still considered early compared to the time they used to work in Japan: staying until midnight, one, or two in the morning, and going back to work at 8 in the next morning was not rare. Yet, this does not mean that American or other locally hired employees do not work hard (see more discussion in 5.2.). Some employees come to the company 6 or 7 in the morning and stays until 6 or 7 in the evening. Some work at home after having dinner with their family. Visibility of the Japanese expatriates and invisibility of other employees who stay and work at night in the company, however, are more likely to contribute to a Japanese 'hardworking' stereotype.

This Japanese 'hardworking' stereotype is maintained by both Japanese expatriates and the other employees. As mentioned in regard to Akagi's eye surgery before, he and Oda humorously cooperated to insist on working at home even after the surgery. On top of this, Bill commented, "Japanese are WORK WORK WORK!" emphasizing Japanese mercilessness. The image of hardworking Japanese is sustained and protected by the Japanese expatriates. If you were an expatriate, you were expected to work late without questioning.

There is no doubt that Japanese expatriates have excessive work to accomplish. However, the main reason for the time schedule is contacting Japan, which is fourteen to fifteen hours ahead. The Japanese expatriates also need to be always ready for receiving a call from Japan. Some of them go to see the other expatriates after 7 or 8pm without making an appointment or phone call since they expect them to be in the office. A frequent comment by some of the Japanese expatriates, "Those who are working late in the office are usually Japanese expatriates," identifies 'hardworking' as their important group identity and commonality which should not be violated in order to keep expectation from Japanese employees in Japan and to sustain a positive and stereotypical image to American employees. In other words, you have to work late if you are Japanese to prove that Japanese work hard.

While maintaining a Japanese group image of 'hardworking,' some Japanese expatriates search for individuality and resist Japanese stereotypes. Case in point, Akagi showed that he was not humble about receiving compliments about his group's good result on machine sales from Bill. Akagi's utterance, "I know," responding to Bill's comment, "Akagi-san, you are in good shape. Are you working out?" does not represent either Japanese or American ways of receiving compliments. Akagi tries to show his uniqueness and differences from typical Japanese and American behaviors.

Such behaviors are also shared by other Japanese expatriates on Halloween. On Halloween in 2000, two Japanese expatriates, Ishida and Minami, dressed up to be two main characters from "A Night at the Roxbury" because

their BU's theme was Saturday Night Live. Both of them wore matched black suits with bright red and blue shirts. At the contest, Ishida and Minami showed up with a portable stereo and walked around the judges shaking their heads with music like the movie.

To quickly explain their background, Ishida and Minami came to US Semicon together a couple years ago from a factory in a small town in Japan. They are in their early thirties and they have never worked or studied in the United States before; therefore, they still have a difficult time speaking English. They are not so called Americanized or Westernized. They rather look like stereotypical quiet and hardworking Japanese because of their way of presenting themselves in a quiet and calm manner. The main reason for participating in Halloween was that Ishida and Minami's American colleagues asked for their cooperation. Ishida and Minami, who are fairly new in the US, of course did not know about Saturday Night Live or the movie, "A Night at the Roxbury." The American employees instructed them about what to wear and how to walk. Ishida and Minami rented the movie and studied the two brothers. Their performances at the contest were hilarious not only because they acted the brothers from the movie very well but also because their behaviors were far different from their original or ordinary ones that the other employees used to seeing in them. The audience cheered for Ishida and Minami on the stage and supported their participation.

Although Minami and Ishida participated in the event because they were asked by their American colleagues, they also wanted to break out of the mold of the Japanese expatriates' conventional image; quiet, busy, shy, and unwilling or

hesitant to be a part of American festival-like event. They knew that not many Japanese were going to take part in Halloween unless they were obligated (for instance, Japanese employees in HR must wear costume because HR organizes the event). However, Ishida and Minami decided to be different and enjoy themselves like American employees do. As long as Ishida and Minami work for US Semicon, they wish to be a part of it regardless of their nationality or the company where they originally come from. At the best dresser contest, the judges announced that Ishida and Minami won a prize (free movie tickets). Although Ishida thought that they received the prize *because they were Japanese*, they indeed entertained the audience for giving an atypical Japanese impression and took one step forward to getting rid of the hesitation and shyness of participating in Halloween. Many American employees must have wished that the other Japanese expatriates would follow Ishida and Minami in the future. More importantly, however, Ishida and Minami experienced different kinds of cooperation, unification, and fun from the ones they usually encounter in normal work activity. Laughter they shared with the other participants became very precious to become a part of their BU and US Semicon.

As a result, what Ishida and Minami learned from Halloween is not only courage of showing different image of Japanese expatriates but also being truly a member of fun loving employees. The laughter that Ishida and Minami shared with their American colleagues might be similar to the experience associating with what Bakhtin discusses in folk humor or carnival laughter that constitutes a different reality outside of the office (Morris, 1994). While people are covered

with costumes and they become not themselves, they forget about work, status, hierarchy, authority, power, and norms and overcome fear of being free from the office and fixed images of themselves. Although Ishida and Minami did not express their differences through spontaneous humor, they exhibited their different personality and uniqueness through Halloween laughter. Their positive effects were shown the following year when more Japanese expatriates participated in Halloween.

The next example demonstrates problems caused by two distinct and almost incompatible management philosophies and conflict existing between two departments who have different responsibilities.

6.3.2.2. The Dilemma between two goals

The most prevailing business concept shared by the US Semicon employees is customer satisfaction. This notion is especially revealed in Max's humor, "The only option is *seppuku*." As discussed before, *seppuku* is an ultimate suicide to show responsibility for one's failed action, loyalty, and commitment to one's master. In Japan Semicon Group, it is a belief that organizational growth is realized through customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is imperative to maintain a strong and long relationship with customers and be honest, polite, kind to customers, and responsible for one's own actions. Incorporating this philosophy genuinely into business practice with a customer, Max emphasizes not looking for any excuses or the customer's probable mistakes but taking total responsibility for whatever the machine caused. Max's reference to '*seppuku*' actually implies to take an action of apology for the failure to satisfy the customer, anticipating that

the customer will accept the apology, appreciate US Semicon's aftercare, and continue to have a good relationship in the future. Losing a long relationship with a customer has to be avoided at any cost.

Although Max's suggested action is appropriate to recover a good business relationship, there are times when the employees feel trapped in between customer satisfaction and profit growth. Profit growth is also included as one of the key elements in the Japan Semicon management philosophy brochure, and it is explicitly communicated as an important goal of the Japan Semicon Group. Komiya's comments, "*Penarutiida*! (Penalty!)" and "*Toichida*! (10% interest a day) toward the customer who has not completed the payment on the due date show his anger and frustration not only toward the customer but also toward top management.

Komiya discovered the tardy payments in almost every monthly meeting. The delay of the payment ranged from not only a couple of months but to more than six months. In the monthly videoconference eight months ago, the participants talked about the same issue and pondered what they should do to have the customer pay. While Komiya said, "No discount in the future," jokingly, he suggested that payment notice should be processed by the following: after one month delay, inform by email, after three months by letter, after six months physically go and ask. However, a more serious problem was brought up. Even though Komiya's subordinates wanted to go and ask the customer for payment directly, one American top executive manager did not allow them to take such action because he wanted to maintain a good relationship with the customer.

Komiya, who had been working for Semicon US for more than six years, began to see how customer satisfaction hurt his BU and go against this Japan Semicon's policy.

The conflicting viewpoints between top management and Komiya's BU are seen in different performance expectations in the company. Top management keeps a close eye on each BU's overall performance on profit and tries to preserve a good relationship with customers. Top executive managers sometimes go to see their customers to discuss a future relationship and negotiate their service, often times without notifying or asking the business units. BUs including Komiya's BU, on the other hand, are primarily responsible for gaining profits since their profits are directly related to the company profit. If BUs are too easy, too kind, and too accommodating with the customers, they will eventually lose profitability. Although the top executive managers have to be aware of profitability as well, they tend to overlook this issue since they do not directly deal with actual sales quotes and service for the customer. Conflict especially occurs when top management promises to provide the customers with some kinds of service without extra charge and a BU cannot offer them due to a limited budget or a lack of manpower. This discrepancy, furthermore, influences how both of the parties perceive each other. Top management considers especially Komiya's BU, which generates more than a half profit of the company, as arrogant and snobby due to their rigorous attitudes toward the customers. On the other hand, the BU sees top management as not being cooperative and afraid of confronting with the customers.

In addition, Nishijima's remark in a different BU, "(a customer's name) wanted everything… It's not good for (our) health," indicates a difficult position in which he stands for between customer satisfaction and profit growth. Although the participants did not mention top management in the meeting, they felt difficulty determining which position they should place priority. Since the customer is very important to the BU, for it brings the most profits, Nishijima does not want to lose the customer. If the customer is not happy with service, things are likely to be escalated. More likely the customer will report to his top management. Then top management of the customer will contact US Semicon's top management. If that happens, many times a discussion will be carried out only between the customer and US Semicon top executives without directly involving the BU managers. Top management involvement with the customers does not always turn out to be a favor of the BU, particularly when they are profitable to the company, because US Semicon's top management attempts to preserve a good relationship with the customer regardless of an arduous labor that has to be completed by the BU. Therefore, Nishimura needs to maintain a satisfactory level of the customer's happiness, increase the profit, and avoid escalating issues to top management as best he can.

Meeting customers' needs and providing customers' wants are somewhat different concepts. The confusion leaning toward the latter practice occurs especially when top management takes customer satisfaction and future relationships with the customers into consideration. As discussed several causes of Japan multinational corporations' low return in the United States, US Semicon

might also place an emphasis on long-term but not immediate profit, in spite of that maintaining a balance between short- and long-term profits is deemed to be significant in the management philosophy booklet.

Thus, the humorous remarks uttered by the BU managers reveal a rather oppressed struggle caught between profit growth and customer satisfaction, between their way and top management way of doing business with the customers, and between short and long term profit. Indeed, every action to take for customers is influenced by a various kinds of beliefs, values, and benefits for the organization, but it is often determined by which levels and departments the managers belong to. By communicating such frustration and conflict through humorous accounts, members in a department strengthen their relationship with other members and share their understanding of paradoxical reality.

The organizational realities I discussed here were not solely supported by humor but also expressed by other communication forms. However, due to the lighthearted nature of humor, people tend to find it easy to reveal unexpressed struggles, negative feelings, contradiction, and honest opinions that were experienced in a bicultural and conflictual workplace. Even when people are being humorous, they sometimes incorporate with the truth and the opposite of the truth about realities and themselves.

As people engage in everyday interaction and activity at work by producing and reproducing specific ways things are done and should be done, they are accustomed to the community of practices and eventually they do not have to think why and how they do every time. Another bicultural aspects are

found in videoconferences in which both Japanese and American employees attend as a normal part of their work.

6.4. BICULTUALISIM IN VIDEOCONFERENCES

As an important and prosperous subsidiary, Semicon US is responsible for communicating with Japan Semicon to update business issues and ask for further guidance from factories and headquarters that have more experience. Besides email and telephone conversations, workers frequently make use of videoconferences. The Japan Semicon Groups equip videoconferencing facilities within their buildings due to their many subsidiaries dispersed throughout the world. In the Semicon US building, two videoconferencing rooms are available. In this section, I will discuss issues of videoconferencing and analyze interactions between US Semicon and Japan Semicon during videoconferences.

6.4.1. Issues of Videoconferences

Videoconferencing has been technically available since the middle of 1970's, yet its first worldwide use began in 1985 by the United States Information Agency, a company which provides overseas journalists with an opportunity to ask questions of top administrations (Hilton & Jacobi, 1986; Bohm & Templeton, 1984). Since then, the price of videoconference equipment has declined and technology has improved. Currently, videoconferencing is being used in a variety of fields such as government, education, health care, and business application (Rhodes, 2001).

Videoconferences in Semicon US are mainly utilized for updating and sharing information with Japan. They start between 6 and 7 p.m.[40] depending on standard or summer time in Semicon US, which corresponds to 8 or 9 a.m. in Japan, because of the 14 to 15 hours time difference. The meeting usually lasts from one to three and a half hours. If Semicon US employees attend a meeting which lasts more than two hours, pizza may be ordered and eaten before or during the videoconference. This is a perk for the US participants since they have to stay at the company after work hours during dinner time.

The participants' opinions about videoconferencing are split into two sides; ineffective (Group A) and effective (Group B). People in Group A insist that they can accomplish the same amount of work through telephone conferences. The only difference between telephone and television is the capability in videoconferences to see people's face on the other side and show some documents through the screen. A number of Japanese assignees do not feel that it is necessary to use videoconferences either. Ease of use, accessibility, and availability of telephone conferences are attractive to people in Group A. They also disfavor videoconferencing because of the split-second delay between picture and voice transmission, which produces an unnatural interaction (Mortlock, et al, 1997). Not only does this prevent attendees from having a normal verbal exchange as in a face-to-face conversation, but it also interrupts the flow of the conversation and creates an awkward situation. Voice delay, rather than the

[40] For an urgent case, a videoconference sometimes starts at 8 p.m. A videoconference starts at 8:30 a.m. in the US, and with Semicon Europe (England), at 2:30 p.m.

robotic movement of figures onscreen[41], tends to make a meeting flow unnaturally. For example, if you are listening to a report from the Japan side and you have a question regarding the report, you ask the question. Due to the delay of transferring your voice to Japan, when you ask the question, the Japan side has already begun stating their next sentence. Then the Japan side hears your question in the middle of their sentence, and so they stop and listen to your question. On your side, you hear part of a sentence and then silence. Perhaps you start to repeat your question, but at the same time the Japan side begins to answer you and your voices overlap. Then, both of you apologize, "Sorry" and try to pass speakership to each other, "Go ahead" "Oh no, you go ahead." This exchange might take only 5 seconds, but it is strange and frustrating if it happens many times. It puts off the core of the conversation, and speakers and listeners have to clear up their overlap, go back and restate what they just said moments before. One Japanese assignee commented on this point:

> *Hon no chotto no zure ga komyunikeeshon o muzukashiku shiterun desune. Hanashi ga umaku mawaranaku nattekuru wakedesu. Ningen tte omoshiroi naa, kono isshun no gyappu de sura, noomiso ga ninshiki shiterun dana, to omoimashita ne. Dakara, kore ijyoo ittemo korejya chiguhagu ni nacchau toka…honnoo-teki ni wakatte imasu. Dakara narudake yaritori o herasu… Sore wa omoshiroi terebi-kaigi no hakken deshita ne. Igai to ikesoo de igai to ikanai kana, to.*
>
> That split second lag makes our communication difficult. That disrupts our discussion from flowing well. I think that is interesting… I thought human

[41] Creighton and Adams (1998) explain this movement nicely; "one limitation of videoconferencing is that when you view a number of people simultaneously on a split screen their movements appear jerky and awkward. It does not look like a movie or television. If you remember watching old silent movies, they also appeared jerky and awkward. The reason was that they showed fewer frames per second than a modern film. The 'smoothing' out of the picture occurs by showing many more frames, that is, by providing much more information. The same problem still holds true for many videoconferencing systems" (p. 59).

> beings are interesting. Our brain recognize this one second gap. So, we can intuitively tell that our conversation will break down if we say more… Therefore, we try to decrease the number of conversational exchanges… It was an interesting discovery about videoconference. Videoconferencing appears to be useful but not really.

Another assignee maintains that if he considers the effectiveness of face-to-face meetings as 100 (perfect), a telephone conference scores a 50, and a videoconference rates a 70. The difference between a face-to-face conversation and a videoconference is distance. While people can have day long face-to-face meetings, it is impossible to do that with videoconferences due to the time difference. In addition, although participants can see each other through the screen and although they appear as though they are nearby, they are in fact far away. One participant declared, "*Kutsu no ue kara ashi o kaku mitai na knaji o ukerundeune.* (It's like you scratch your feet over the shoes)," implying that he cannot quite reach the focal point because it is camouflaged by the technology. Furthermore, videoconferences make it impossible to hear off-record information. The Japanese manager states that if people have a face-to-face meeting, they can have lunch together after the meeting and express each other's *honne* (true feeling), yet not with videoconferences. The existence of a mute button provides for a different experience than direct communication (see more discussion in 6.4.3.6.). People on both sides can use this function when they do not want the other side to hear their talk. The Japanese might use the function more when they do not want to translate word for word something that they want to discuss in Japanese among themselves. They use the mute button so that they don't bother the US side with their Japanese. If that happens, people on the US side have to

wait wondering what is going on until the discussion is over or a decision is made. Lastly, a most frequent complaint about videoconference is that it begins at 6 or 7 in the evening in the US, which is especially disliked by American employees because they do not want to stay after work hours.

An advantage of videoconferencing, according to Group B, is the amount of information people can get through non-verbal communication channels, like facial expression and body language. As stated before, Japanese engineers try to ascertain the prevailing atmosphere at the factory through videoconferencing. It is important for them to be sensitive with the other side's circumstances in order to work well with them. One Japanese employee exclaims that virtual face-to-face meeting is meaningful for him because he receives more information just by looking at people's eye. He said, "*Ningen tte shaberu nowa kuchi dake dewa nakute, kao zentai, karada zentai ga shabette masukarane.* (People speak through the whole face and the whole body, not only from their mouth.)" Another Japanese manager is impressed that the screen makes it possible to see a reaction as obscure as a slight movement of the body. He explained:

> *Shigoto nante kami no ue de kaite yaruhodo no hakkiri shita koto bakari jyani desukara. Arui wa aite ga sore ni yotte dooyuu mondai o aite ni taishite kaiketsu surunoka toka wakaranai. De, ichiban wakari yasui nowa sono shunkan no hannoo nandesu… Moo isshun ni, sorega tatoeba te ga arukoto ni tsuite ugoita toka soredake de wakarundesuyo. 'Ah kore sukijya naindana' toka 'Kore ga nanika kare ni mondai o ataetana' toka. Sore o shigoto dewa ienai toki ga arundesune.*
>
> Work does not always contain clear-cut issues which can be described on paper. Or we cannot really tell how others solve what kinds of problem for whom. How can you tell? That's through that moment's reaction… On that moment, we can tell, for instance, through which one's hand moved about a certain thing. We can tell, "Oh, he doesn't like it" or "This (issue

> just presented) gave him some kind of problems," which he may not be able to express verbally on business settings.

Despite jerky, unnatural motions, it is still possible for the videoconference to transfer how people react through their bodies. Hand and head movements are especially clear on the screen. When Japanese employees put their heads on the table, scratch their heads, and cover their heads with both hands, they are having a very difficult time, they are in trouble, or they cannot answer a question, said an American employee. Whenever a Japanese on the Japan side made such gestures or body movements, participants on the US side giggled. Furthermore, communication with visual aspects increases familiarity; and therefore, participants feel more personal. One American employee feels better asking something face to face rather than through email because it is more personal. A Japanese BU general manager in Japan wants to see his subordinates' faces from all the subsidiaries at least once a month, since he can hardly meet them directly in person. Immediate or sometimes forced responses due to a time limit and the presence of an audience makes videoconferencing more productive, claimed an American sales specialist. Finally, a videoconference is much less expensive in a comparison with traveling overseas, which is a major plus for videoconferencing from the employer's view (Duran & Sauer, 1997). This benefit becomes especially critical during the recession in Semicon US because the company prohibits employees from traveling. The videoconference is also much less tiring for the employees than when they have to spend time traveling and recovering from the time difference flying back and forth across time zones.

6.4.2. Routinization of Videoconferences

Since most videoconferences are conducted regularly, participants on both sides are familiar with each other and how the meeting is conducted. Since most of the participants in Semicon US and Japan Semicon have met one another through business trips or regular meetings and have videoconferences biweekly or every month, meetings are fairly casual, structured, and routinized.

6.4.2.1. Seating Positions

The number of attendees depends on the scale or purpose of the videoconference. It ranges from one on each side to up to eight (rarely more than eight). Illustration 6.4.1 illustrates typical layouts that participants tend to use during videoconferences. Semicon US (1), Iris, is the largest conference room in Semicon US. In contrast, Semicon US (2), *Tampopo* (dandelion), is a very small room. Although Iris has about 8 tables all together, attendees usually use only two tables and conduct their meeting at the corner of the room. *Tampopo* has only one table; therefore, if there are more than four or five participants, some have to sit behind the table without a desk. A copy stand camera[32] is set up in front of the TV monitor in *Tampopo* (Illustration 6.4.2). Attendees use it when they want to show the other side documents. Usually high ranking employees, such as a president, a vice president, a general manager, an assistant manager, or a meeting leader, are seated in positions ①, ②, and ③ and control a keyboard (Illustration 6.4.1). A speaker or reporter often takes one of the seats and passes it on to the next speaker. If a videoconference is conduced three-ways, one can see one side on a main screen and the other side at the right lower corner as in Illustration 6.4.4.

The camera focus is normally on the three seats and/or main speakers. If attendees from behind have questions or comments, the camera angle is adjusted to focus on the speaker. A portable microphone is sometimes passed on to the speaker to provide the other side with a better sound effect.

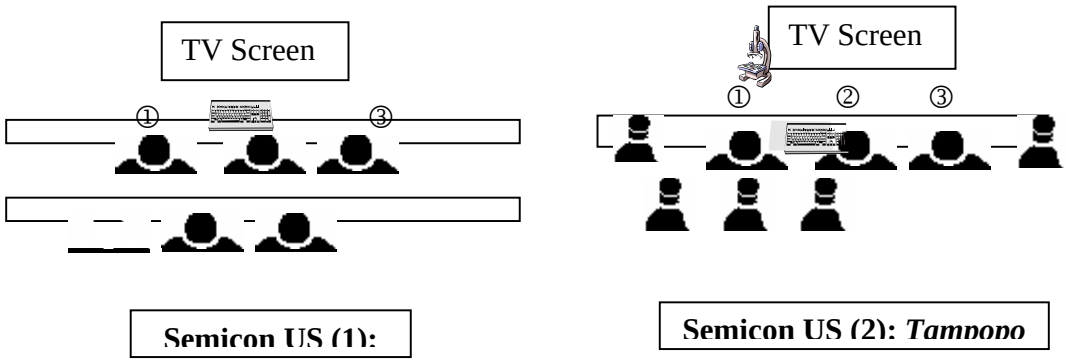


Illustration 6.4.1: Layouts in Videoconference in the US

Illustration 6.4.3 illustrates two views that the Semicon US side sees when the Japan side is on a TV monitor. High-ranking managers or a main speaker sit in the middle and the first row; positions ① and ② in Japan Semicon (1) or ①, ②, and ③ in (2). Since attendees in Japan Semicon mostly listen to reports or answer questions from Semicon US, no one changes their seat during the meeting. When someone has a report or provides information, a microphone is passed to the speaker and the camera focus will be adjusted. Illustration 6.4.1 shows a different view of the Japan side on the screen. In this conference, the person who was sitting closest to the screen led the meeting.

The way attendees sit is similar between the US and Japan; high-ranking personnel sit in the closest table from the screen and usually in the middle. Only difference between Japan and US side, however, is attire. As shown in the picture, employees in the Japan side wear suits whereas an American employee wears more casual clothes.

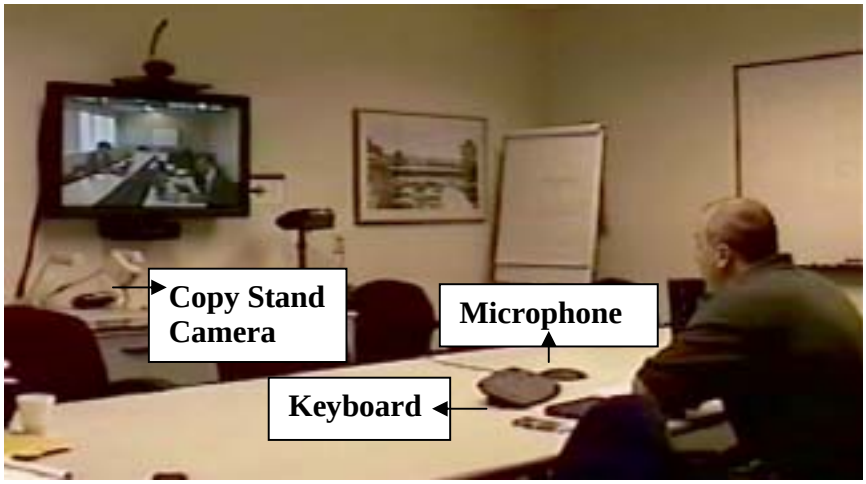
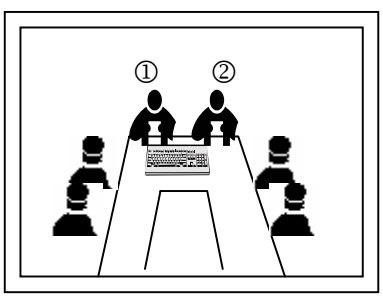
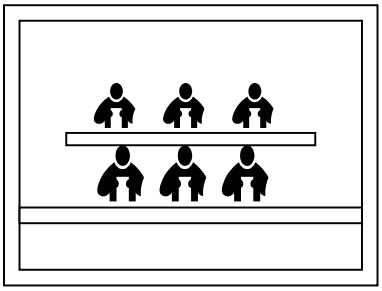


Illustration 6.4.2: Videoconference in *Tampopo*



Japan Semicon (1)



Japan Semicon (2)

Illustration 6.4.3: Layouts on the Screen in Videoconference

Illustration 6.4.4: Picture in Picture (Video Screen)

6.4.2.2. Beginning of Videoconferences

As in to face-to-face meetings, when participants see others on the videoconference screen, they greet each other. However, greetings do not match in terms of times of a day and/or language differences. The following is a typical videoconference beginning:

Japan Side: Good evening!

American Side: *Ohayoo gozaimasu* (good morning)!

Both the Japan and American sides put themselves into the other time zone and greet correctly according to the other side. When it is 6 or 7 p.m. in the US, it is 8 or 9 a.m. in Japan. Therefore, it is morning in Japan where people are coming to work greeting 'good morning,' while it is evening in the US where employees are on their way home. However, in the videoconference, the Japan side greets according to the American time and the US side greets based on the Japan time. And when the US side greets in Japanese, the Japan side greets in English. Likewise, although participants on the US side hear their Japanese colleagues greeting them in English, they don't return their greetings in English. The following exchange also occurred:

Japan Side: Good morning!

American side: *Ohayoo goazaimasu* (good morning).

Japan Side: Actually, good evening.

Another example is:

American Side: *Ohayoo gozaimasu* (good morning).

Japan Side: Good morning.

Their greetings are uncoordinated appearing two different linguistic codes or complimentary phrases. This way, however, participants show their courtesy, return the complement, and display biculturally sensitive behaviors by adjusting their time to the other side or speaking the other language.

Followed by the customary greetings mixed with some Japanese words, meetings start immediately in English, unless they are waiting for others to join them. A manager on one side who normally creates the agenda begins by saying, for example, “We have two agendas today,” or “Today, we are going to talk about…” Sometimes, a manager asks to discuss something prior to issues on the agenda. For instance, one American manager recommended to the Japan side that they discuss the most important issue first. He started, “I have bad news,” and then briefly explained a problem with one of the customers. However, the Japan side asked him to discuss other issues which were on the agenda for the first 30 to 40 minutes and then talk about the problem. The American manager agreed and the Japan side started reporting some decisions that were made in a top management meeting in Japan. This tendency that Japanese employees want to stay with the agenda was also seen in other meetings.

Oftentimes people wait until all attendees have arrived before starting a meeting. Meanwhile, small talk is exchanged between the US and Japan sides. Usually, Japanese employees like to engage in such informal talk. For example, a Japanese manager on the US side provided quick information about Thanksgiving to the Japan side, telling them that most of the employees in Semicon US were taking the next day off. Sometimes participants noticed someone’s haircut on the

other side and commented on how the person looked. Some participants, especially Japanese managers, like to play with the camera. One time, a Japanese manager asked the US side, “What time do you think that I came back to the hotel last night?” and answered his question himself, “Three (a.m.)!” and giggled. Then he started to play with the TV functional key by zooming in on two Japanese members who looked very sluggish. The manager said that they stayed up late last night as well. He zoomed in on one of them very closely and said that he had a lot of English lessons from a Brazilian at the bar. He also zoomed in on another member who was looking down and teasingly said that he went home around 5a.m. Another time, a Japanese employee on the Japan side looked around the whole conference room on the US side by changing the camera angle and found me sitting in the corner of the room. Then he zoomed in and said “Hello” to me.

The tendency that videoconferences begin right away if everyone is present reflects an American business style – going straight to the business issue; whereas, the tendency that Japanese employees engage in personal talk while waiting for others to come shows a Japanese way of doing business – establishing a relationship before starting a meeting. The participants in Semicon US do not violate the two cultural practices. Rather they use it according to a situation.

6.4.2.3. During Videoconferences

Due to the nature of videoconferences in which both sides exchange, share, and update information, participants’ interactions are very structured and regulated. Before analyzing their interactions, I will discuss the necessity of agendas for these meetings and the need to have duplicates of documents on both

sides of the videoconference. Kydd and Ferry (1994) found out that preparation for a meeting, such as making high quality visual aids or enlarging photos or blueprints to enable the other side to see, and a structured meeting process, such as discussing narrowly focused topics rather than open-ended topics, were prerequisites for holding an effective videoconference. Although attendees in Japan Semicon and Semicon US rarely use enlarged visual aids or photos, they prepare clear agendas for both sides to discuss and detailed handouts for them to follow. Normally, one side writes up the agenda, prepares the handouts, and electronically sends them to a representative on the other side before the meeting. This representative is responsible for making copies according to the number of participants that will attend. If there is no representative, files are sent to each attendee. Either way, it is normal that both sides come to the meeting with a printed-out agenda and documents, or with laptop computers that have all of the necessary information. Since the information is created using PowerPoint, the handouts include clear headings, sub-headings, key points with larger fonts, and some visuals such as graphs and charts. This makes it easier for participants to see and follow the discussion during the meeting.

More importantly, the written information helps both Americans and Japanese who have different linguistic backgrounds. Americans find it easier to understand strong Japanese accents when they can also see written information. Likewise, Japanese can also follow fast-spoken English by seeing the information. This became evident, for example, when a Japanese (Nonaka) asked an American employee (Don) a question that was not related to the information that Don was

reporting. During Don's presentation on service issues, Nonaka suddenly asked about a packing issue. Don's Japanese colleague (Kuroda) on the US side shouted, "*Pakkingu* (packing)?" Don was confused and said, "Parking? Like driving?" *Pakkingu* is a loan word that was borrowed from an English word, packing. Generally, loan words are pronounced in reference to the phonological structure of the language being developed (target language) and symbolized in accordance with the orthography of the target language. Don made the best guess of 'parking' from the Japanese loan word, *pakkingu*. Yet, it was not correct. Kuroda repeated "*pakkingu*" quietly. Nonaka explained in Japanese, "*Kabi ga haeteta* (It was molded)." Meanwhile, Kuroda tried to explain to Don by making a gesture drawing a square box with his both hands, saying "No no no *pakkingu* (packing)." These difficulties seldom occur if a question or comment is related to the written information and issues.

In spite of attempts to provide the same documents on both sides, participants sometimes carry different information as a result of updating and transferring data back and forth many times. If that happens, the meeting moves very slow and participants become frustrated. Unlike key points written in PowerPoint, data is very complex and written with small numbers and letters. One time an American manager was discussing with the Japan side a number of machines that had been ordered by customers. The data sheet showed meticulous information that included more than fifteen customers and the locations of their factories, machine product numbers, the status of their orders, and more numbers that were not relevant. Both sides tried to look at such small numbers and letters

in the complicated charts over five legal size pages. However, wherever they looked, they found different numbers. This caused enormous confusion on both sides. Not only did they find incongruent results but they could not follow where the other side was indicating. It took a while to find a place that the other side was talking about because of different information, and it took even more time to figure out which version was the most current. During this unproductive interaction, a Japanese manager disappointedly said:

> *Nanto kennsetsuteki janai kaiwa dana. Yappa, erekutoronikku ja naito damedawa. On rain de onaji deeta o minagara hanasanaito, sokoni hyuman risoosu mo hairukara. Toranjishon ga ooito, okutta doku ni taisite, dono sitsumon o shiteirukaga wakaranai. Riaru monitaa ga naito. Intaaneto beesu ni kyoooyuu to yuu fairu o ijirinagara suruto hayakunarundaga.*
>
> What an unproductive conversation this is. It is no good if it [the data] is not on electronic. We need to discuss looking at the same electronic data on line. Besides, human resources are involved [in the data]. If we use many transitions [of information], we don't know which updated documents we are asking about. We need a real [online] monitor. We can communicate much faster if we use the same-shared files using the Internet on the video monitor.

The manager wished that both sides could see the same data online, looking at a monitor. Although participants were able to see and talk through a videoconference, it could not be defined as real time because the data they were handling was not consistent. Thus, carrying the same information, with the same page numbers is critical so that both sides are able to refer to their points by pointing out where to look in the handouts. This might also be significant in face-to-face meetings, yet it is more important in videoconferences because

participants cannot sit next to each other, look over one other's documents, extend their arms to point out a place, or figure out mistakes side by side.

The significance of carrying the same information are likely to solve the linguistic difficulty that both sides encounter. While preparing the report, however, the world is moving and information is constantly updated. Due to the time difference between the US and Japan, participants have to be careful with issues that may not be critical in face-to-face communication.

6.4.3.4. Structured Talk

During a videoconference, one of the sides usually reports updated information and the other side listens and asks questions. Normally, the receiving side waits to ask questions or give comments until the speaker has finished reporting a paragraph, topic or section. When an interruption is needed, the attendee often calls the speaker's name. For instance, "Tom-*san*. I have a question," "Steven! Steven! From your perspective, …?" or "Shibata-*san*, I want you to understand…" This strategy of using a person's name to gain their attention or interrupt them is used by both Japanese and American employees. Although other phrases, such as "May I interrupt for a moment?," or "Excuse me?" are also used, it might be more effective to remember a reporter's name and call it for an interruption. One Japanese manager, however, maintained that interrupting someone in videoconference was very difficult. For him, it was still a one-way interaction and not real time communication. While it is easy to interrupt someone in face-to-face meetings by saying, "Ur," or using body language, it is very difficult in videoconference because the other side may not catch subtle

movements and timing. The manager wished that the participants could display a question mark or some type of symbol on the screen to indicate that someone has a question. Because of this reason, it is also important for a speaker to give a short pause or ask if the other side has a question before moving to the next topic or section. Furthermore, "OK" and "Thank you" are frequently used as a way of expressing, 'I understand,' 'Go ahead,' and 'Go to the next topic.' Also, directive questions are often used, such as "Can you confirm…?," "Is it true that…?," or "Do you mean…?" Thus, many of the talks are structured by bouts of reporting or commenting and listening, and asking or answering questions. Furthermore, directive rather than rhetorical questions are used in videoconferences.

6.4.3.5. Some Trends in Videoconferences

Every videoconference differs depending on the purpose of the meeting and the participants involved. However, appreciation and gratitude were always overtly expressed to each side. During a business unit's monthly videoconferences, a Japanese general manager on the Japan side frequently praised reporters on the US side. For example, when Sam completed his report, the manager said, "Thank you. I can understand very well... Thank you, Sam! I think it's a good marketing activity. Good job. Thank you." Also, when Kevin nicely summarized his 27-page report within 20 minutes, the manager said, "That's a good report, Kevin. Thank you very much. Nice report." The manager also made an appreciative concluding remark at the end of the meeting. The following is an example of one of his final remarks to the US side:

> Thank you. I have one or two comments to everyone. Thank you very much for attending today's meeting… [He explained the summary of

> fiscal year 99, profit, aim of the next year's profit.] Asia and US will be big. We appreciate that… Thank you very much. I'll go to Semicon US from... I want to make my presentation when I come. US business is a key part because… Without the success of US business, we cannot continue to be successful. I hope Semicon XX and Semicon US continuously work together…Without cooperation, we can't win… That's my concern. I appreciate. Without US success, we cannot continue to be successful. Thank you very much again. Sincerely.

He thanked the participants for attending the meeting and then emphasized how US business would determine the success of Japan Semicon. This tendency contradicts the results of several studies (e.g., Paulk, 1997; Sumihara, 1992); Japanese managers are not likely to praise their employees. In fact, the Japanese general manager above has been stationed in the US for two years; therefore, it is possible that he acquired this habit while he was working with American employees in Semicon US and maintained it even after he went back to Japan. Also, a Japanese assistant manager on the US side commented that this general manager was good at asking questions in English that American employees understood and that he never forgot to praise them. Furthermore, the praising comments indicate that the Japan side holds more power than the US, implicitly giving directions how the employees should prepare the report and work cooperatively to be successful.

In another videoconference, an American executive manager repeatedly thanked the Japan side, saying "I appreciate the information that you sent me confidentially. Thank you very much." At the end of the meeting, he again said, "Once again, thank you very much." Then the Japan side said, "No no no. We are in the same team." Also, an American general manager on the US side showed his appreciation openly, "Thank you, Ando *san*," or "Thank you very much for the

update. I appreciated it very much." These appreciative comments, however, demonstrate a rather subordinate position on the US side. Normally, the US side provides update information to the Japan side; whereas, the Japan side makes decision and rarely reports the issues on its side. For the US side, therefore, receiving information from the Japan side is somewhat special. The Japan side's reply, "No no no. We are in the same team," implies that it is all right for the US side to ask for information and communicates a sense of teamwork that both sides should attain. Thus, appreciation for sharing information or attending a meeting and returning gratitude toward a person who spoke highly of one's report prevail during videoconferences with an implication of power inequality. These complimentary expressions, however, are critical to virtually connect with the other group and guarantee successful interactions in the future among people who have limited opportunities to meet face-to-face and show thanks nonverbally, such as through shaking hands or patting each other's shoulders.

6.4.3.6. The Function of a Mute Button

I briefly introduced the function of the mute button at the beginning of this section. Using the mute button might be seen as equivalent to whispering in face-to-face interactions. When one side pushes the mute button, the voices on its side cannot be transferred to the other side. The mute button is used several ways. For example, when the Japan side was reporting something, someone came to the conference room on the US side to deliver a message to the manager. The manager on the US side pushed the mute button, listened to the person, and told him what to do. Meanwhile, the Japan side kept reporting its status uninterrupted

by noise from the US side. At the same time, the manager on the US side was able to help his employee. The manager might have missed the information that the Japan side reported; but, he could follow along because he had hardcopies of the information in front of him.

Several American employees reported that the Japan side tends to use the mute button more often than the US side when the attendees want to short discussions, clarifications, or decision-making among themselves in Japanese. One time in a videoconference, after an American specialist asked a question, people on the Japan side started talking in Japanese and pushed the mute button without saying anything to the US side. Not only did the other's side sound disappear, but the US side could see a sign 'Far End' (see Illustration 6.4.3.) on the screen. A few seconds later, its leader looked at the screen, smiled, waved to the US side, and rejoined the discussion. While the Japan side was discussing, the American specialist on the US side also muted his end[42] and explained to an employee who was attending the videoconference for the first time:

> They sometimes mute their end and [hide?] their conversation. Sometime when we have a translator here, we mute this end and ask the translator, 'What did they say? What are they talking about? Then, they [the Japanese] will tell us [after their discussion]. Another time, they mute and have a long conversation in Japanese and it might go 20 minutes...

The American manager described the situation positively, "It's more fun," and "It works better." Because he was used to encountering this type of situation where Japanese employees speak Japanese among themselves, he was not surprised and did not seem to be bothered by their muted activity. After the Japanese on the

[42] When the American manager muted his side, a signal "Near and Far End" showed up on the screen.

Japan side talked for about one and a half minutes, they released the mute button and told the US side that they understood the point that the American manager had previously made. This situation shows that the Japan side wanted to clarify the American manager's point in Japanese with other Japanese. One question might be, Why did they have to mute? They might have thought that they should not bother the other side with language that the Americans could not understand. The Japanese leader might have felt embarrassed because he could not understand the American's point and had to clarify it with the other Japanese. However, it is more likely that the Japan side muted because they knew that they had to speak among themselves in Japanese for a while. During the videoconference, they exchanged many quick conversations in Japanese without muting. But it did not go beyond more than 10 seconds, whereas their muted conversation lasted for one and a half minutes. The use of Japanese in meetings is not different from face-to-face meetings that I described earlier. However, the difference is that the mute button completely shut off the conversation from the other side.

If muting during videoconferences is similar to whispering in face-to-face situations, it might leave a bad impression on the other side. As I explained earlier, some American employees cannot endure Japanese who speak Japanese in front of them in a meeting because they tend to feel that they are missing information, or that the Japanese are talking about them. However, such a situation does allow the others to hear their Japanese conversation. In contrast, the muting function shuts off both linguistic code and sound. Even a translator or a Japanese on the other side does not have access to the muted dialogue. Unless

participants disclose their muted discussions afterward, the mute function can endanger or deteriorate their relationship with the other side. Interestingly, however, employees I observed in videoconferences did not seem to be bothered by this muted action. The employees on the side that was shut off might giggle a little, but they waited, chatting with other employees or silently, as if it were a part of their normal interaction.

People sometimes make negative comments using a mute function while the other side is reporting. For instance, one videoconference was conducted between the Japan side and the US side to discuss places for improvement. A little after the meeting began, Ted pushed the mute button and told the Japanese manager on the US side, “I hate this meeting so bad. I don’t know why I have to be involved in this.” Then, he looked at handouts of the discussion items and said, “Internal communication? All companies have this problem. The company X’s internal communication sucks. I just hate this meeting.” The Japanese manager nodded and smiled warmly. Ted continued looking at the handout and said, “I hate this meeting. Just reading it (by pointing out the handouts). Did you read this question and answer?… Whew! Good thing we got drunk after the meeting!” This videoconference was moving very slowly at this time since the purpose of the meeting was not to share or exchange information, but to discuss pertinent issues and procedures that the participants had to figure out. It was less structured and coordinated. Ted showed frustration toward this clumsy way of conducting a meeting. As Kydd and Ferry (1994) proposed, unstructured or complex discussions, like the above meeting, may not be suitable for videoconferences.

I actually encountered only one videoconference when the Japan side muted its conversation and several times when the US side did; therefore, I cannot generalize what is a Japanese or American tendency. The mute button seems to be used in videoconferences that require more decision-making or handle complicated issues more often than the ones that simply exchange update information. Since the Japan side holds more power with poorer linguistic skills than the US, it might use the mute button more often in a situation that the Japanese attendees want to clarify and make a decision in Japanese.

6.4.3.7. Emotional or Controversial Issues

In Kydd and Ferry's study, several interviewees suggested that videoconferences would not work well for emotionally charged or controversial discussions. Although videoconferencing is a poorer medium than face-to-face meetings, in a multinational company people may not be able to avoid using this second best alternative. In Semicon US, emotional and controversial issues were frequently discussed by a Japanese manager on the US side, Tanaka. Tanaka usually began the meeting with a statement like, "*Mondaiten kara hanasasete itadakimasu* (I would like to speak about problems)." Problematic issues that he discusses range from the personal level, to team, departmental, organizational, global, and top management levels. He points out problems to the Japan side in a very straightforward manner every month. For example, one of his Japanese assignees was engaged in a new, large, and critical project that would eventually be adopted worldwide. However, he was having a difficult time moving on because seven Japanese managers on the Japan side asked his team to submit a

report every other week, a major task for the team that interfered with their progress. Tanaka said, "*Yome shuutome no arasagashi jya nainndakara* (This should not be like nitpicking between a bride and her mother-in-law). *Kane wa dasukedo kuchi wa dasanai yooni shite hoshii* (I want them to give us money but not their mouth)."

Although Tanaka tries to make the best use of videoconferencing by communicating controversial issues, it tends to make the meeting longer. There is always an agenda for this monthly meeting. However, since controversial issues are not included in the agenda, the organizational properties of the agenda are lost, and meetings are likely to become tiring. The videoconferences sometimes last more than three hours without a break. When Tanaka's monologue begins in Japanese, the American attendees patiently listen to him without really understanding the issues. One Japanese manager felt that the monthly meeting was oftentimes meaningless. He believed that the way of conducting this meeting was not an American way or somewhere between American and Japanese ways, but completely a Japanese way. Most of the time he left meetings without knowing the significance of them. This contradicts my earlier observation that Japanese want to follow the agenda. In Tanaka's case, the Japan side has more resource control and higher status than the Tanaka's side but the Tanaka's side has more legitimate power since his BU generates most profit in Semicon US.

Also, Tanaka's communication style; discuss controversial and emotional issues, might reflect a preferred business communication approach that several Japanese employees mentioned. They used phrases, like "*hontoo no*

komyunikeeshon (dedicated communication)" and "*chi no kayotta komyunikeeshon* (literally, communication that blood goes through – breathing communication)," to illustrate their communication that they want to have at work. On the other hand, many American employees showed their ideal business communication that is more accurate, purposeful, and concise.

To make a point, Tanaka was in the position that could control the meetings in his way communicating what he believed valuable.

6.4.3.8. The Use of Japanese

Tendencies to speak Japanese among Japanese and American employees are often seen in videoconferences. Although most of the Americans cannot speak Japanese, they utter frequently used short phrases in Japanese. A typical example is the greeting at the beginning of a videoconference. Also, American employees often say "*hai* (yes)" during a videoconference. When the Japan side clarifies Americans' points or reports, they say, "*Hai*." However, it is rare for Americans to catch the perfect timing with perfect intonation. Most of the time they use "*hai*" once or twice with their entire report, but they say it at the slightly wrong time or pronounce it a little different from how native speakers would. If Americans are adept at using it, they always use "*hai*" instead of "yes" as acknowledgement. Other times, American employees use as much vocabulary as they know, such as "*Chotto mattekudasai* (please wait for a second)," or "*Tsugi onegaishimasu* (next please)."

Japanese attendees also speak Japanese such as "*hai*" and, of course, longer sentences as well. The use of the Japanese language again depends on the

type of videoconference and who is participating. In a particular BU's monthly videoconferences, Japanese employees strictly speak English. On the Japan side a Japanese attendee might briefly ask a person sitting next to him in Japanese how to read a graph on the handout. Yet, many times the Japanese speak to other Japanese in English, even when they talk among themselves on their side. The Japanese managers on the US side only speak English, except for when they mutter to themselves phrases such as "*muzukashii naa* (difficult)" or "*wakaranai naa* (don't get it)." There was one time when a Japanese manager on the US side asked his several subordinates on the Japan side to stay after the meeting. After both American and Japanese attendees on the US side left, he began asking his subordinates some questions in Japanese. He explained the reason that he did not ask the questions during the meeting, "*Yappari kooyuu koto wa miitingu chuu ni ienai deshoo. Eego toka nihongo no mondai jya naku hoka no hito no jikan o saite made yuubeki koto jya nakatta* (I couldn't say such things during the meeting. This is not a matter of whether I speak Japanese or English. This is not something [related to others] that I could have addressed by using up other people's time)."

In another of BU's videoconferences, a Japanese manager often speaks in Japanese by switching a code. When Tanaka states controversial issues in Japanese, he sometimes briefly translates them into English, but not all the time. When he doesn't or cannot translate, he apologizes the American attendees; "Sorry, it's kind of a touchy issue." Even when Japanese participants speak Japanese, some Americans can sort of understand what they are discussing from the terminology they use. For example, Ted was reporting documentation issues.

He asked the Japan side about the Japan Semicon manual, “Do you know the Japan Semicon manual?” Yet, the Japan side did not really know what it was. Tanaka tried to help, “You know the Japan Semicon Manual. It’s taken from a regulation booklet.” Then, he explained some changes about the manual in detail and raised some issues related to it in Japanese. When he also mentioned “Global Governance,” Ted jumped into the conversation and commented on it. Tanaka was surprised to hear Ted’s comment and said, “*Wakatteru naa* (He knows/understands)!” This is the moment Hanks (1996) describes: in order to communicate, people do not need to share the same language, unless they co-participate in interpreted activities and share the same view. Obviously, Tanaka and Ted were aware of the issues relating to the topic that they were discussing in two different languages.

Furthermore, translations from Japanese to English and English to Japanese frequently occur during videoconferences. For example, when a complicated problem is presented, a Japanese attendee tries to understand in both Japanese and English. One time, a Japanese manager on the Japan side reported a problem detected on semiconductor equipment, describing a complex procedure that affected color variations. An American manager on the US side was not aware of the problem and asked the Japanese manager for more explanation. The Japanese had a difficult time explaining it but somehow managed it in English. When some Japanese attendees on the Japan side asked him questions in Japanese, he switched the language code and explained the same situation in Japanese to the Japan side. Then, he added new information in English. After

several confirmations were exchanged between the US and Japan sides in English, a Japanese manager on the US side tried to confirm what they had discussed so far in Japanese, starting "*Nihongo de kakunin sasetemoraimasuto*… [I would like to confirm in Japanese…]." Then, he expressed the seriousness of the problem to an American attendee on the US side in English. The American participant understood the situation and agreed to help. Thus, Japanese employees tend to feel limited when exchanging all information in English. To avoid misunderstandings or further confusion, they like to confirm ideas in Japanese. There are times when some attendees on the Japan side cannot understand English very well. When they have questions or suggestions, they might first try to speak English. But, most of the time they do not make sense to anyone. A Japanese manager asks in Japanese to understand them better. Then, they restate their questions in Japanese and he translates them into English for the US side. A similar situation occurs when a meeting is being conducted in Japanese involving a small number of American attendees. Americans ask questions in English, Japanese translate them for people who cannot speak English, and then their answers are translated back into English for the Americans. Using both languages to translate back and forth might be a time-consuming process. However, it is critical for non-native speakers who do not want to misinterpret information or be excluded from discussion.

The videoconference is an indispensable facility for international companies. Although the technology has not quite yet reached the point where it can reproduce natural interaction, it still conveys richer information than email or

teleconferences for participants who value the immediacy of facial expressions and body language. It is probably possible to establish a good relationship through email and telephone, but videoconferences enhance familiarity by allowing the participants to exchange small talk while looking at one another. Although some people complain about the time difference, no one can control how far away parts of the world are from one another. Keeping in mind the cost, the time spent, and the physiological hardships encountered by traveling to a different country, videoconferencing lessens company expenses, employee fatigue, and jet lag while increasing convenience and frequency of interaction between people who are separated by distance.

I also described bicultural aspects in videoconferences. Seating patterns are shared both Japan and the US sides. Normally, managers with higher status sit closer to the camera, control the camera angle, and rarely change their seat during the meeting. Both sides begin meetings with courteous greetings. Although their language codes or greeting phrases do not always match one another, they exhibit their compliments by putting themselves into the other sides' shoes. Preparing for an agenda and carrying the same handouts are a must for videoconferencing not only because participants on both sides depend on them to follow discussions, but also because they have different linguistic backgrounds. During videoconferences, participants' talk remains structured because they have established a consistent way of conducting a meeting with directive phrases and clear procedures through repetitive interactions. Small talk is very limited adopting the American business style. If it occurs at all it is only at the beginning of a meeting while participants

are waiting for others to arrive, and Japanese are more participative in personal issues.

Still, some participants found it difficult to interrupt the other side during videoconferencing. A few techniques are mentioned as ways to alleviate this problem: asking whether the other side has questions, or taking a longer breath before moving to the next section. Also, due to the time committed to a videoconference, and the preparation necessary for the meeting, participants are appreciative to each other. Both sides explicitly and overwhelmingly use thankful words and phrases to maintain their relationship. The mute button is unique to videoconferences, but it can be compared to whispering in face-to-face meetings. Its positive aspect is that a reporting side does not get interrupted by talks or noise from the other side. Japanese attendees might use the mute button more often when they want to talk among themselves in Japanese about some complicated issues or something that requires a quick decision making. Although some American employees feel that this allows the process to work better and more quickly, others might think that the Japanese have secrets or that they are talking behind their backs. Furthermore, emotional or controversial issues are sometimes discussed during videoconferences demonstrating a Japanese preferred business communication style. Finally, even though English is an official language, Japanese is also used by both Japanese and American employees. American employees show courtesy to the Japan side while Japanese tend to use it for avoiding misunderstandings or helping other participants who cannot understand English well.

6.5. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 6

This chapter focused individual and interactional levels of analysis; how people attempt to make sense of the bicultural workplace by being, becoming, and doing. People learn everyday how to be an acceptable member of the group at a workplace. Due to the biculturalism in Semicon US, many members acquire the bilingual and bicultural speech pattern according to the both cultural rules. Demonstration of bicultural terms of address is likely to indicate how much people are enculturated into, adopting, and accepting the US or Japanese way. Problems associating with the languages are specifically mentioned to illustrate how Japanese-speaking members might disturb people who cannot speak Japanese. Due to the locus (the US) and the official language (English), speaking Japanese without (complete) translation seems to create a defensive environment and increase frustration and distrust among English speakers. By interacting with others and observing how they behave, organizational actors also learn how to maintain themselves as an ideal person that they want to be portrayed by others. The active negotiations of identity construction often reflect where they and others come from (cultural backgrounds). The members constantly seek how (not) to behave based on cultural behavioral assumptions, stereotypes, or generalization and attempt to determine where they and others belong behaviorally. This finding shows how strongly people hold stereotypical views toward one's and other cultures and try to make sense of themselves, their experiences, and others based on those perceptions. Discourse and interactional analysis discovered organizational members' habitual ways of engaging in collectively. Humor

section elaborated how members of the group work together and discuss serious and boring issues by making their work more fun, spice up, stimulated, and merry rooted in the shared proverb; “Laughter is the best medicine.” This section proved that members, regardless of their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, could laugh together by linking their shared membership, experiences, and common interest. The analysis of videoconferences demonstrated habitualized interactions in conducting virtual meetings across the ocean. The virtual meetings are structured and formalized through repeated interactions by incorporating small pieces of cultural aspects and involving several language issues. Habitualized interactions and ways of conducting videoconferences reduce uncertainty among participants and also provide a clear view on what is going on here and there.

The micro analysis of discourse and interaction revealed several important issues in intercultural communication. Narratives demonstrated tension and disapproval toward the conduct or the communication behaviors of culturally distinct people, while the analysis of discourse and interaction illustrated collaborative behaviors by enhancing team spirit, commonality, shared history, and group membership. This can be interpreted as although people of different cultural or linguistic backgrounds might have perceptional conflicts or disagreements, they can create successful interactions because of their habitualized everyday practices, and their shared goals, knowledge, and ideology. In contrast, it can be also interpreted that it is still difficult for people to get away from cultural stereotypes, because such generalizations help them construct who they are and how they should behave in terms of another.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

We live in a world in which we can relate to others, regardless of different national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. An organization is a living community that provides its employees with a set of values and expectations, which are related to the external world, to survive and be successful. The employees are active learners and negotiators who constantly seek what to do and how to do to make the job possible, how to interact with others to work collaboratively, and how to behave and construct their identity in order to become an accepted member of the organization. In this dissertation, I examined intercultural communication in a Japanese multinational company in the US. Rather than discovering differences between Japanese and American employees, I tried to investigate different practices among the employees, their activities, and their intercultural experiences. It was a difficult task for me to decipher the complexity of intercultural communication experiences in a multinational organization. As discussed in the introduction, I was especially interested in the notion of habitus with which people habitualize their perspectives, practices, and accounts through repetitive activities. Developing habitus and routinization of perspectives and practices in our daily activities and interactions makes our lives more efficient, easy, and predictable. Employees in business also acquire habitus by repeatedly getting things done, engaging in similar practices, or interacting with others. Accordingly, habitus becomes an important concept that positively and negatively influences a multinational company in which employees share

similar knowledge and ideology but different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Examining intercultural communication in the multinational company under the process of globalization in the world, I also attempted to illustrate relationality between the world and an organization, between the organization and its employees, and among employees in an overseas subsidiary. To conclude this dissertation, I will answer the research questions that I proposed in Chapter 2, focusing on how we can understand the intricate intercultural communication in a multinational organization. Then, I will explain how I, a Japanese female researcher, was impacted by and constructed my experience at the company and how my identity allowed and inhibited access to information. Finally, I will propose future implications in terms of method, business practice, theory, and research.

7.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

1. At the macro level, how has globalization influenced the form and values of a large organization as communicated to a subsidiary? How does the organization use the process of globalization to construct shared schemes of perceptions, values, and habitus which are conveyed to its overseas subsidiaries and set the expectations and goals? What kinds of aspirations are sought in organizational actors as a member of the global group?

To clearly understand intercultural communication in a Japanese subsidiary in the US, it was critical for me to examine the influential external world, the parent company, because the subsidiary was interdependent with the parent company. Chapter 5 describes how the parent company realized the necessity of globalizing the company and attempted to accomplish its goal by changing the existing values to new ones relating to the consciousness of

globalization. Japan Semicon used the term *globalization*, which normally describes the process during which the world has contracted due to technology and during which people have become more conscious of the world, in order to construct new ideas, strategies, images, and ideal work attitudes in employees. In other words, globalization was no longer a set of facts to the organization, but became a set of values that would affect the employees' behaviors, expectations, and communications in the workplace. Relating to the external force, organizational structures, management philosophies, and ideal characteristics are modified in an attempt to truly become a global company. It also seems possible and important for multinational companies not to lose their particularities during the globalization process because they will play a significant role in indicating the company's attraction and organizational members' special feeling of belonging. Their originalities are likely to be expressed in comparison with other companies by demonstrating how different and special their companies are. By contrasting with other companies and learning unique aspects of their company from their managers, employees co-construct ideology, habitualize the company's practices, and pass them on to the next generation and to other subsidiaries. It seems also true, however, that marginalizations tend to get lost along with the company's expansion and globalization to search for global harmony and protect the company from risk. While the word *globalization* can become a shared interest and category among employees, it seems considerably difficult to create a shared schema of what it means to be a global company that involves individuals' different terms, purposes, and perceived power.

This macro investigation of a global context made it easy to move to the next level of analysis in research question 2 (a local field) where intercultural communication actually is taking place.

2. How does an overseas subsidiary try to incorporate its parent company's nationality, its values, practices, and habitus to create an ideal bicultural workplace for employees of two cultures? What kinds of practices are found? How are the practices handled by organizational actors from two cultures?

A subsidiary is likely to be constructed under a certain goal, direction, and ideology of the parent company. When the parent company establishes an overseas subsidiary, the subsidiary as well as its members might find it challenging to incorporate different aspects, practices and views of two cultures into one organization. Chapter 5 is devoted to finding out these issues. When two distinct cultures come to together in one organization, it is likely to establish a bicultural workplace to satisfy employees of two cultures and to sustain its parent company's will. Biculturalism at an overseas subsidiary, in fact, is a complicated phenomenon where active negotiations by employees are involved. Practices are often determined and enacted based on cultural, local, and the parent company's perspectives. Some practices are specifically organized with consideration to differences between the two cultures in order to introduce and promote a local culture (Halloween, Meals-on-Wheels, etc.) or to fill a lawful gap (sexual harassment). The ways of approaching these practices involve individuals' active learning by negotiating their own habits, cultural practices, relationships with others, impressions from others, and responsibility of maintaining the organizational ideology. Bicultural practices co-exist without distracting the other

culture, but maintaining original features of both cultures with the understanding that "It is all right to be different." Organizational members freely participate in their own practices and other cultural practices and enjoy different aspects of them. Analogously, negotiated cultural practices can be described as 'preparing the best dish for different circumstances with available ingredients.' Negotiated practices often come into existence to make up for weaknesses of one culture and to take advantage of the available resources from the two cultures. It might take time to create such practices that fit best under different circumstances and purposes. The negotiated practices, however, are likely to strengthen an organization by increasing consciousness of incorporating the best of two cultures for good reason and intention. Finally, shared practices were identified with similar practices of two cultures, which promote active participations and shared schemas. On the other hand, different expectations of information-sharing and linguistic barriers tend to hinder the achievement of common ground. Thus, different types of business practices in a multinational company demonstrate active negotiation, learning, feeling, and frustrations of organizational members from different cultures.

3. At the micro level, what habitualizations of behaviors emerge in face-to-face communicative activities in a bicultural workplace?

After understanding a local field in which people of different cultures work together, Chapter 6 attempts to answer the above question using discourse analysis, paying attention to specific communicative activities. When people of different linguistic backgrounds work together, they are likely to create unique

speech patterns involving different cultural terms of address, features, and vocabulary with an attempt of displaying respect, acceptance of the other culture, and willingness to become a member of the group. Speaking one's own language with his/her linguistic group in a meeting, however, tends to endanger the relationship with other linguistic groups and to violate the shared company goal of becoming global. Furthermore, in a multinational company consisting of groups of people from different nationalities, employees are likely to use their image of each other's nationalities to understand who they and others are and to control their conduct and opinions. Addressing nationality or identifying oneself or others by a nationality in commenting on character, personality, or preferred behaviors demonstrates how individuals attempt to construct themselves or depict others in the light of widely- known stereotypes. In other words, stereotypes are used to shape behaviors and to replicate or perpetuate the same stereotypes. Refusal or claim to be perceived according to nationality are constantly brought into effect to show to which group one belongs and in what way one should be viewed by others. Further, it is likely that people expect others to behave in a certain way according to their portrayed cultural behaviors; Americans are expected to behave like Americans and Japanese are expected to behave like Japanese. If they cannot demonstrate their own nationalities, they are considered favorably or less favorably depending on context, interactants, job responsibilities, or roles. Accordingly, the address of nationality no longer indicates one's geographical national origin, but it is used to connect with and separate from people of the same and different nationalities in an intricate manner.

Despite the cultural and linguistic differences, it is possible for employees of two cultures to have fun in a workplace and overcome barriers. Based on the shared belief that "Laughter is the best medicine," employees enjoy working together by engaging in various kinds of mirthful interactions. Humor not only releases the tension in a workplace and brings bliss and hearty moments to rather monotonous and solemn meetings, but also enhances group membership, familiarity, unity, shared understanding, business values, and beliefs of what is or should be happening. Humor can also function to mitigate criticism or negative comments and destroy or perpetuate stereotypes lightheartedly. Shared work circumstances, work history, memberships, understanding, and familiarity tend to make humorous interactions and utterances possible among people beyond different cultural and linguistic gaps. My study showed how habitualization of practices in videoconferences enabled employees to smooth out their interactions while overcoming technical and linguistic difficulties. As a result of videoconferencing on a regular basis, employees on both sides tended to develop procedure, patterns, and ways of reporting and responding.

Intercultural communication in a multinational workplace is one of the consequences of the process of globalization in the world. In a company that is going to be global, employees of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds work together beyond national boundaries. Even though each employee's job may not be directly related to globalizing the company, it is after all only people who can actualize this goal. A true global company may not only demonstrate economical power but also show behavioral and interactional power that make it possible for

people with various backgrounds to work together effectively and collaboratively and pass their co-created practices on to the next generation without losing its originality. It may not be an easy process. As this study shows, the process involves active cultural negotiations on organizational and individual levels. Nonetheless, a multinational organization is a place in which employees from different cultural backgrounds learn, engage in, and habitualize different cultural practices. It is also a place that provides employees with shared perceptions, objects, categories, expectations, goals, and schemas which make it possible for them to reach mutual understanding that can be described beyond language. Intercultural communication in such a multinational organization is not a momentary event but on-going, involving relationality with others and habitualization of practices.

I attempted in this study to show how we live in the so called "global village" and how our expectations have begun to be set based on the criteria of a "global mind." "Be sensitive with other cultures" or "Be open to other cultural perspectives" are phrases used everywhere to encourage global thinking. To operate multinational or global companies successfully, employees are required to have this *global mind* to work together with cultural others successfully. A parent company's overt attempts to promote and encourage globalization and to unite across the ocean suggest that employees have to get along and work together collaboratively. And, of course, the employees do want to get along with others; they succeed regardless of their different linguistic and cultural barriers, because they are consciously living in a global world, because they spend most of the day

together at work, and because the success of the business, which eventually determines the employees' job security, depends on each other's effort, motivation, and cooperation. Willingness and the fact that they get along with others were apparent when the employees tried to have fun together at work through humorous interactions. Different cultural or linguistic backgrounds do not greatly interfere with their work because they have shared knowledge and understanding of moment-by-moment activities. Also, people habitualize their activities and practices through routinization in which a shared language is not so important to communicate what is happening.

However, willingness, the fact that employees get along, and habitualization of co-created practices do not always mean that employees agree with the ways others should be or the ways things should be done. Individuals still have images and ideologies about others and themselves, which can lead to potentially irreconcilable differences in practice and perspective; they constantly negotiate which is better, which is wrong, how things are supposed to be done, what is American, and what is Japanese. Stereotypical images or generalizations of themselves and cultural others serve to define employees' identities and memberships and function sometimes to segregate groups as well as to unite them. This can be determined by interlocutors' purposes and intentions under different circumstances. In an organization in which people of different cultures work together, frequency of switching the cultural memberships or favoring and disfavoring one or the other seems to be more active because of the strong presence of cultural others. National identifications become more complicated in

such situations. For example, in Semicon US, when American employees mention Japanese employees in general, they tend to refer to individuals in Japan and not to those residing in the US because the Japanese employees in Semicon US are more enculturated into American practices and understand how things should be done in the US. Similarly, when Japanese employees mention Americans in general, they tend to exclude those who exhibit characteristics similar to stereotypical Japanese behaviors as well as those who have lived in Japan for several years and have shown extensive understanding of Japanese culture. However, if the Americans who are excluded from the typical American category demonstrate typical American characteristics, they are likely to be concluded to be "American after all" by Japanese employees. Likewise, if Japanese or Americanized expatriates display conservative attitudes, they tend to be reconsidered "because they are Japanese" by Americans as well as Japanese who have acquired bicultural understandings.

In spite of this constant battle of what is right and who is right, employees from both cultures need to get along and do get along because they have a shared mission of globalization and the motivation of reaching a common ground. Everything, from the external world, to a shared work environment, goal, knowledge, expertise, practices, understanding of differences, habitus, interest, and passion, is all related to contribute to working together collaboratively beyond cultural and linguistic barriers.

To achieve common ground, people do not need to have a shared cultural background. Scollon and Scollon (1995) claim, other cultural aspects such as

ideology, socialization, or status influence understanding, misunderstanding, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction in intercultural communication. This study particularly demonstrates that *shared* organizational ideology, goals, history, understanding of moment-by-moment activities, and motivation to get along or find common ground, contribute to successful work relationships and experiences. On the other hand, people are conscious of their own and other cultures, differences, and stereotypes. Cultural differences are not evident in real interactions *per se*, but they are used in interactants' sense-making and construction of identity and behaviorism to verify why they behave in certain ways and why they think they are different from cultural others. Culture indeed teaches people how to behave and what is (not) appropriate, as do cultural stereotypes. At the same time, culture often becomes an instant excuse of explaining why people cannot find common ground or get along. From this perspective, the existing literature on intercultural communication is inclined to the latter trend, viewing culture as a source of misunderstanding, by neglecting other cultural aspects that can create successful intercultural communication. Cultures in the global village or borderless world are complex and involve a number of individuals with different expertise, experiences, interests, and goals. We are somehow connected with each other and our communications always involve contextuality and relationality. The literature of intercultural communication needs to go beyond comparisons of general cultural or national differences and examine communications that are taking place with certain relationships in specific contexts.

7.2. A RESEARCHER AS A BIASED ENTITY

This ethnographic research in studying intercultural communication in a Japanese subsidiary in the US employed analysis of documents, such as company newsletters, websites, catalogs, and meeting handouts, participant observation, interviews, and discourse analysis. Analyzing documents helped show how the parent company has changed and strived to become globalized in effects of internal and external causes. This was a great tool enabling access to something that happened in the past and organization of the process chronologically. Participant observation promoted my learning about a variety of activities, practices, and issues in meetings conducted by both Japanese and American employees. Participating in the company and social activities and observing meetings also made it possible for me to gain insider's perspectives toward concerns, issues, and focuses of the company as a whole and in different departments. Through interviews, I learned about personal experiences, feelings, opinions, and frustrations with the company, and about relationships with managers and colleagues. While formal interviews drew answers according to prepared questions, informal interviews were more spontaneous and I was able to obtain interviewees' honest opinions, *honne* (true feelings), or something off-record without formally restricting their time and threatening them with a tape recorder. Through discourse analysis, I closely examined how people do things with words. It particularly helped me to understand how employees can have fun, habitualize accounts and perspectives, and demonstrate relationality with others.

These four methods were all important in my understanding of employees' intercultural experiences and of intercultural communication in a multinational workplace. Most of the analysis involved findings yielded from not one but a combination of different methods. The four methods were essential for me to understand this complex business world and employees' concerns, practices, and utterances. Case in point, employees' accounts of "globalization" would not have been truly understood if I did not pursue a real meaning of it based on the parent company's stance. Or I would have never understood projects and employees' frustration in the overseas subsidiary that were closely related to the realization of a leading global corporation.

By using triangulation of methods, I was able to identify issues that were and were not constantly changing. The companies and employees I describe here may be different as of today. I saw numerous changes in the last three and a half years. The company made new strategic plans in every quarter or every year. The company's websites and propaganda changed over time. The economy went up and down. People came and went. Many things happened in the world. Individuals' new experiences and perspectives were born everyday whereas old ones were forgotten, destroyed, or revived. In this sense, this dissertation is just a snapshot of many dynamic beings, related to the best of my knowledge. On the other hand, there are some constant issues that cannot be influenced easily by external force, which are mental images, pictures, stereotypes, generalizations, and ideologies of who we are and who other nationals are. Furthermore, the employees' passion, willingness, and efforts to get along with cultural others

existed over time and will be maintained probably as long as the company persists with its global ideology.

My identity and experiences also influenced this study. I am biased in several aspects. I was constantly placed in an ambiguous position because I am single, Japanese, a Ph.D. student, a researcher, and a trainer. I was partially accepted in certain groups but not fully. Different actions, behaviors, and opinions were sought according to my different identities. Some information was blocked because I did not share the same status, experiences, or background with others. My group memberships changed depending on my roles. Before I was officially accepted to study the company, I often went out for lunch with American managers to discuss the project and training. During my fieldwork, I often ate lunch with a group of Japanese administrative assistants or Japanese expatriates. During my time as a trainer, I ate lunch with participants who are mostly Americans. I was often invited to farewell dinners for Japanese expatriates or employees but rarely to lunch or happy hour to which only American groups would go. In this sense, I had more access to Japanese female employees and Japanese expatriates. Further, I, as a Japanese and an intercultural communication trainer, might have been hindered from hearing about frustrated experiences from American employees. My research findings are considerably different from Paulk's study (1996) in which she described American employees' dissatisfaction and frustration toward Japanese employees' English and behaviors in a Japanese multinational company in the US. She certainly had access to such reactions demonstrated by American employees, but I did not because I was Japanese

myself. As a non-native speaker living in a foreign country, I felt grateful to many American employees who showed interest in Japanese culture, an understanding and willingness to work together, and patience toward some Japanese employees' poor English as well as their heavy accent. All in all, I was never able to separate or get away from myself in the field, which might have affected American informants' responses or interactions with me.

If someone else was looking at the same organization, he or she might have focused more on misunderstanding or communication clash between Japanese and Americans. My impression was that intercultural communication in this organization was quite successful. Negative voices, which I described in this dissertation as they appeared, were the voice of people in the field. But, this study turned out to be about how people in one organization communicate positively and successfully because of and in spite of their cultural differences.

7.3. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This ethnographic study of a Japanese multinational company and intercultural communication in a workplace opened my eyes to different things. While existing studies on intercultural communication tend to compare communication patterns and predict conflicts across cultures, my longitudinal study of intercultural communication in a multinational company demonstrates that intercultural communications at work were not one-time events but rather ongoing events, which involve dynamics of relationships, habitualization of practices, history, and shared goals and ideology. Cultural and linguistic barriers do not necessarily prevent employees from understanding each other because they

share other cultural aspects that make it possible to communicate. However, there is one thing that they cannot get away from - the mental image they have of their own and other's nationality. Employees get along because they want to and because they are supposed to. Nonetheless, their perceptions of differences always exist to make sense of others, themselves, their own and other cultures, and the world they are in.

Intercultural communication is indeed a complex phenomenon in our society. Styles, goals, and expectations will differ from context to context, relationship to relationship, country to country, individual to individual. It is a researcher's mission to unwrap this complexity and to make sense of our field of intercultural communication.

Appendix: Halloween

Front Desk on Halloween

Department Theme: Medieval

Members in a Department

Angels

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